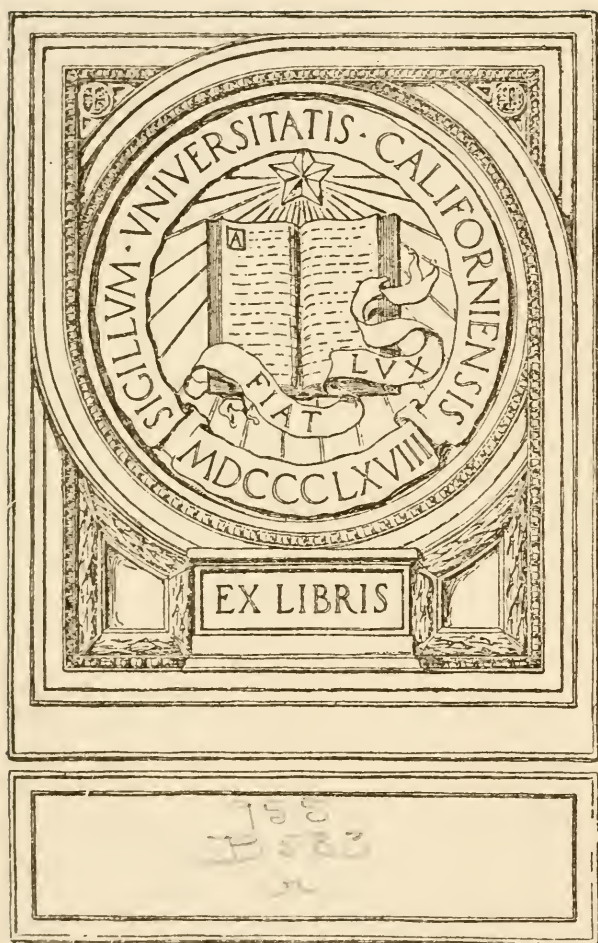


A Roman Tragedy
and others

John Ayscough





A ROMAN TRAGEDY AND OTHERS



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A Roman Tragedy and Others

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A Roman Tragedy.

CHAPTER I.

THE situation contained no promise whatever of tragedy ; in fact, there really was no " situation " at all.

To start with, they were all Romans, and all belonged to the upmost stratum of society ; and for a long time the microbe of tragedy has languished in Rome. When the Eternal City was mistress of the world, and later on while the popes remained masters of Rome, there was nothing at all alien to the tragic spirit in Roman life. But Rome, become the capital of a state instead of an idea, is merely municipal and inimical to tragedy.

To all intents and purposes there were only three persons in the play, and between them they scarcely made a group—certainly not a situation. There was Luigi Crivelli, Prince of Rojate, in the Sabina, whose sisters called him Lulu; whose wife called him Gigi and Gino and (at specially tender moments) Gigino, whose mother called him Lewis, and whose mother-in-law called him Luigi. There was his wife, whom everyone called Ascania. And there was Ascania's mother, the Duchessa di San Stefano, who had reached that time of life in which, unless one

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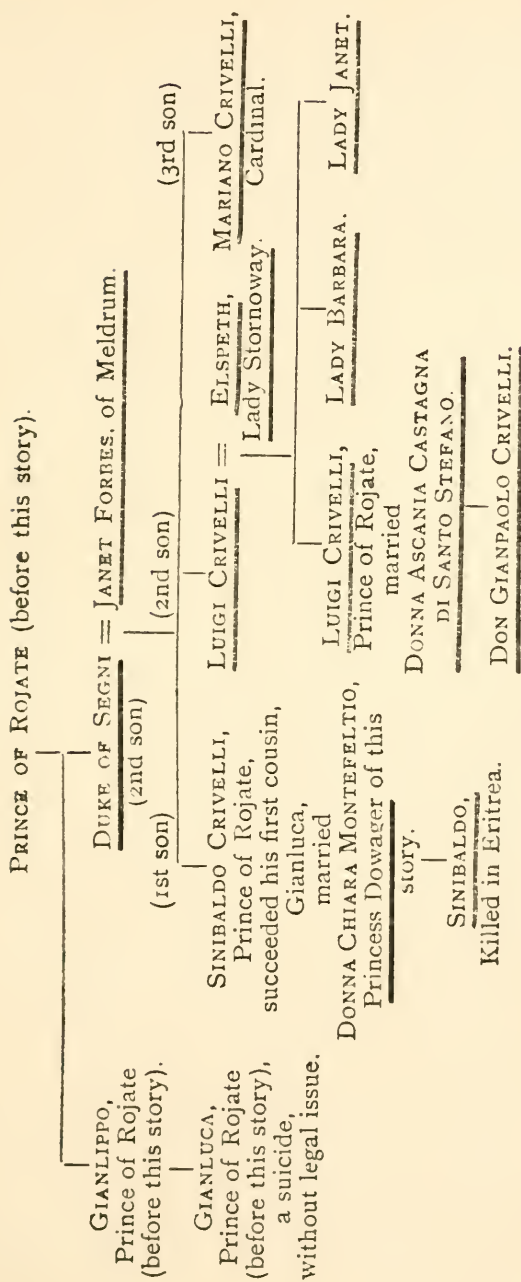
obtrudes provocation for a nickname, one is usually spoken of by one's legal titles and additions.

There was to be a fourth actor in the tragedy, but as none of the others had the slightest knowledge of his future bearing on their fortunes, and were scarcely, if at all, cognisant of his existence, it is not at present necessary to introduce him more particularly.

In spite of his name and his huge castle in the Sabine hills, in spite of his lineal descent from the father of Pope Urban III. and his very ancient title of Prince of Rojate, Luigi Crivelli was, as the Romans declared of him in various tones of voice, an Englishman. The Cardinal Secretary of State remarked it (to the Cardinal Vicar) with a severe tolerance. Luigi's aunt, the Dowager Princess of Rojate, was in the habit of stating the fact, uncontradicted, about four times a week, with acrid intolerance to anyone who would listen ; but then her only son had died, and it was natural that she should attack the only very vulnerable place in her nephew's panoply of perfection. When Ascania's mother, fresh from confession and anxious to get *sans accident* to Communion next morning, was in an unnaturally charitable frame of mind, she would plead that her son-in-law was English, as an explanation, though, of course, not a justification, of his peculiarities. Ascania herself, who was secretly bored by her compatriots, had an inward and unavowed delight in her husband's unlikeness to the other Roman young men. But to his face it was generally made matter of railing accusation.

Luigi's grandfather, who was never Principe di Rojate, but had the title of Duke of Segni, married an Englishwoman, and had three sons by her, of which the second was her favourite and her living

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Those underlined occur in the story.

image. This Luigi Crivelli lived much in England, where he also married, and, his wife having large estates of her own, both in England and Scotland, they lived upon them, and made their home altogether in Lady Stornoway's country, for Don Luigi's wife had a title in her own right. Their only son was destined to succeed his uncle as Prince of Rojate, the other uncle having become a priest and cardinal under Pius IX. ; but this succession did not take place till Lady Stornoway had been five years a widow, and her two daughters were old enough to get married had they been in any hurry, Luigi himself being four and twenty.

How it was that old Luigi Crivelli's grandson came to be Principe di Rojate does not belong to this story, though one may say in passing that it was a humdrum though rather melancholy story of a good many deaths and one horrible disgrace.

Anyway, at four and twenty a young Englishman almost suddenly found himself the head of a great Roman house. For it was true that Lewis, as his mother called him, was entirely English. His father before him had been fair, with grey eyes and chestnut-brown hair. As Lady Stornoway was also a pale blonde, it was not surprising that their boy should reproduce their fair, northern type. What was more surprising was that his sisters should both have recurred to the ultra-dark Crivelli face, with sombre eyes, clear olive-brown skin, and heavy masses of intensely black hair.

The Duchessa di Segni had been to her death a Protestant: still, she had tried loyally to teach the Catholic faith to each of her children—so successfully, that one had become a priest and a cardinal. Nevertheless, certain enemies of His Eminence had been wont to declare that there was a northern flavour

about his Catholicity. This flavour was naturally stronger in the second son, who settled and married in England, whose wife was also a Protestant, though also loyally anxious to teach her boy what his Church would have him believe. The girls were given to her, and them she taught as she herself believed.

For these reasons Ascania privately regarded her husband as little better than a Protestant, though he went to Benediction much oftener than she did, and went to Mass quite as often. Ascania's mother believed her son-in-law to be an atheist, by which term she understood nothing (her attitude of mind towards many subjects), but had a general impression that it was a sort of Protestant who read difficult books, and thought that the original heads of the Roman princely families had been monkeys. She believed this chaotic mental state to result from reading the Bible and "Victor Hugo," by whom, it may be explained, the Duchessa meant Voltaire.

She herself knew that God began creating the world early on a Monday morning, and finished just before twelve on a Saturday night. She was never so really happy as when listening to a Redemptorist preaching about hell, though it terrified her beyond measure, and sometimes caused her to retire to bed, with really terrible neuralgia, for a day and a half afterwards. Hell she believed to be situated in the middle of the earth, and earthquakes she knew were caused by unusually violent dissensions among the inhabitants of that much over-populated dominion. Almost everyone, she thought, except the regular clergy and contemplative nuns, went there, including many of the popes, ninety-seven per cent. of the cardinals, and all the *prelatura*.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT on earth! Gigi, what next are you to do?"

It was Ascania. She often spoke English to her husband, of which in a way he was glad; for though he talked Italian quite fluently, and with a good accent, it was always a foreign language to him. And yet at times his wife's English was almost unbearable.

He looked over his shoulder at her with a glance of mild interrogation.

"Don't you know," she demanded, "what a dreadful thing it is?"

She pronounced the "th" and the initial "d" alike as "t."

"What?"

"To teach Gianpaolo to look by the window."

The young Prince laughed. His laugh was very restrained, and not at all suggestive of hilarious mirth. It was singularly patient, and obviously intended as a good-tempered substitute for argument. Sometimes Ascania accepted it as such.

"Good heavens, Gigi, how English you are!" she continued. "No one in all Rome does it."

"Except Gianpaolo and me," her husband suggested with another gentle laugh.

They had been married nearly five years, and she had never been clever enough to learn that, with all his gentleness, he was, and always would be, a law unto himself.

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He was the last man in the world to set up as an adversary of established customs ; in dress, in manner, in speech he was singularly free from any efforts at achieving a cheap originality by being merely unusual. But it was quite useless to try and shake the rod of convention about his ears.

"Marly often looks out of the balcony window," observed Gianpaolo.

"The balcony is different thing," replied the Princess.

The omission of the indefinite article can, in the course of five years, become far more irritating than the commission of a graver offence. And she came, as she spoke, behind her husband and pinched the child's ear.

Ostensibly the pinch might have been intended as a caress ; but it left a bright red mark, and though the child betrayed by no overt sign that it had hurt him, his father felt him recoil a little.

The Prince understood. His quiet grey eyes, which sometimes seemed rather far away and unobservant, always did see and understand everything.

Gianpaolo was pinched not merely for confuting his mother, or for looking out of the window, in defiance of Roman convention, but also for standing on the window-seat with his father's arm around him, and his own small, round head pressed back against his father's shoulder.

Ascania was doubly jealous. She thought Gigi was fonder of the child than of her—so she assured herself ; and the boy, she would boldly add, loved his father better than his mother, though the former was incapable of adoring the child as she did. So she pinched him.

The young Prince understood it all ; but no

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outward flame of anger flushed up from the quiet fire within. He still looked over the boy's head down into the street.

"You said you had letters to write," Ascania remarked presently. She often got temporarily bored by her own grievances, and would desert them for a time for the sake of variety. Not even to harry her husband would she consciously bore herself. Ultimately she would return to the original grievance, unless, as happened occasionally, she simply forgot it.

"Yes, I had."

"Then why in heaven name's do you let Gianpaolo keep you . . . Gianpaolo, go to the nursery. Your father is busy."

To the child she never spoke in English, though he much preferred talking it to his parents.

"I have written them."

As a matter of fact they lay on his writing-table, and, as he was fully conscious, his wife was now examining their addresses. While he wrote them the child had played very quietly on the floor. If Ascania had been in the room she would have cross-questioned him as to what he was saying in each one.

"Oh, good gracious! What a thick one to your mother! What in heaven can you find to tell her? All about our last row?"

He did not answer. She knew quite well that he would not write complaints of her, nor be willing to admit that they had "rows." She knew also that to talk like that before the child was annoying to him.

"What is it? My brothers never write big letters like that to our mother."

All the same, it was a crime of his that he scarcely ever wrote to the Duchessa di San Stefano when she

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went to Sicily, but found his solicitude on her account sufficiently allayed by the almost daily news he received of her through his wife.

"It is about the property in Scotland. You know I often have business to write about. The letter contains a paper I had to sign."

"I should think you would write about those thing to the agente"

On this remark no commentary was forthcoming.

". . . and no letter to Janet or Barbara? *What* a wonder! But you will write to them from the club . . . so as for me not to know."

"You might ask the hall-porter at the club, you know," suggested her husband.

"Phoo! What ideas for a gentleman!" cried Ascania, with a top-heavy assumption of dignity. "Do you think I would ask a servant?"

He had several years ago made the discovery that anything in the way of sarcasm was thrown away upon her. If a thing was susceptible of a literal interpretation; she so understood it; if not, it merely puzzled her, and appeared meaningless. Her husband, when much goaded, was apt, she thought, to say very foolish things.

As he looked down over Gianpaolo's head into the street Rojate smiled a little. There was nothing more melancholy than this smile of his. If his angel guardian was fond of him, he must have grown sad to see it.

"I believe you write to one of them or other every day," pursued Ascania; "either to your mother, or else Barbara or Janet."

Her husband moved a little, a movement not of impatience but of weary patience. He was deadly tired of her outrageous jealousy of his mother and sisters. As he moved Gianpaolo pressed a very

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little closer. He was only four years and one month old, but he understood.

"It is six weeks since I wrote to either of the girls," remarked Rojate.

"Why does Barbara ask me to thank you for your letter, then?"

"I suppose because she was grateful. No doubt she will answer it sometime. We are not, as a family, great correspondents."

"Phoo! What people! Do you care two and a halfpence for each other? I don't believe."

All this time the Princess had been moving to and fro, fidgeting with photographs, books, anything that could be picked up from one place and dropped down in another. Rojate did not watch her.

Now she came to the window again.

"Dio mio, che educazione! guardare per la finestra! Gino, I will not let it to go on. Send Gianpaolo away; besides, I want to speak to you."

In some mute fashion father and son took leave of one another. There was no ostensible farewell, and certainly no caress. But before leaving the room the child kissed his mother's plump hand.

CHAPTER III.

“ WELL, Ascania, what is it ? ”

He spoke with a sort of good-natured freshness of tone, as though a new conversation were to begin, and the captiousness of the late one to be considered an old story.

“ Oh, nothing. Only I was tired of seeing you two like that ; and I determined to make it stop.”

He looked at her indulgently, without the slightest *arrière-pensée* of sarcasm in his smile, as he stood opposite her, with his hands in his pockets, and said persuasively—

“ My dear child, *what* a child you are ! ”

She laughed and pulled one of his hands out of his pocket. She always envied him his hands. Her own were broad, and of an ugly brown, of a square, un-aristocratic shape.

She had two laughs : one was that of the laughing hyena, the other was not unpleasant. It was not particularly suggestive of mirth, but it was meant to proclaim embarrassment and a certain percentage of good temper.

“ What a hand—like a woman’s ! ”

It was not in the least like a woman’s hand, but for several years he had lost the habit of correcting any innocuous mistatements of hers.

“ Gigi ! ”

“ Well ? ”

“ What are you doing this afternoon ? ”

“ Why ? ”

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“ Will you drive me ? ”

“ Yes, of course.”

He had another plan, and she knew it. Though she never pumped servants, she knew it from her maid, whom she had instructed to obtain the information from the Prince's valet. Had he refused to break his engagement for her pleasure, she would have made his life hideous for a day or so. As it was, she was not in the least grateful.

That she had married the most unselfish man in God's great world she never knew—she did not choose to know. At least five times a week she brought passionate accusations of selfishness against him, when something she demanded of him was impossible. When he agreed to her outrageous demands, at the expense of all his own wishes or convenience, she was never grateful. She told herself he did it to save a row. That all his marvellous indulgence was complacently set down by her as mere moral cowardice he had always known.

It was true he had a shrinking dread of seeing her expose herself—her littleness and vulgarity of mind, her folly, her unreason, her undignified lack of all self-control—even though he were himself the only witness. He had paid for five years a daily price of giving up from hour to hour what he wished to do himself, to save her from so lowering herself before him.

“ Where do you want to go ? ”

“ Oh, anywhere.”

“ Do you mind coming out to Villa Fieschi ? I have some business with Sinibaldo.”

Ascania made a face.

“ To be the greatest bore on earth one must have been born a Fieschi, and I shall have to talk for half an hour with the old Marchesa.”

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Rojate laughed.

"But the Marchesa was not born a Fieschi," he reminded her.

Ascania was obstinate, like most very weak people with little or no mental capacity.

"No, wild cows will not induce me to go to Villa Fieschi."

Of course, it ended in the eternal drive round the Pincio and Villa Borghese. In former days Lady Stornoway and her daughters would no more have thought of trying to capture him for a drive round the Row than of asking him to take a mothers' meeting for them. But the old Countess was a wise woman, and her daughters were wise too: it never struck them that to force Luigi to do what he most disliked was the best way of testing his affection, or displaying their own.

"Turn your hand by the other way," Ascania commanded presently.

She had just been reading a book about palmistry. Her husband did as he was bidden.

"Well, shall I live till I 'm ninety-nine?"

"Phoo! What a hand! Why, it tells nothing. . . . Good heaven, dough! you—you have to commit a murder. You have really, Gino. There! You see it, that line across! *Really*, really, I assure you!"

Luigi returned his hand to his pocket.

"I am beyond measure interested. Who is the distinguished victim? Does your power go as far as that?"

"I wish," laughed Ascania, "it would be Mathilde. Good gracious, I hate her! How she made this gown!"

CHAPTER IV.

“ WHO is that ? ” demanded Ascania.

Her husband had just taken off his hat in response to the bow of a lady unknown by sight to the Princess of Rojate, and she plumed herself on knowing the name and antecedents of everyone in Rome.

“ Do you mind my stopping the carriage a moment ? ” he said, and leant forward to give the order to the footman. The other carriage stopped also, though it had already passed a little.

Luigi jumped out and went to it, turning first to his wife and saying—

“ She is a very old friend of ours. I’ve not seen her for years—since her marriage. Do you mind waiting a moment ? Or if you would rather, drive on and I will meet you over there as you come round.”

They were in the Villa Borghese. It was still early, and there were not many carriages.

Ascania looked sulky.

“ Drive on ! ” she called out to the coachman, without replying to her husband at all, or waiting for the footman to get back to the box.

“ Lord Kilbeg ! ” she heard the strange lady call out, “ what excellent luck to meet you . . . ”

Her own carriage moved away too rapidly for her to catch the rest of the sentence. But the Principessa di Rojate hated to hear her husband called by his Scotch title, and, as it happened, she had heard

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it pretty often. For he had belonged for years to a Highland Militia, and he had been for three years at Oxford, so that it was not uncommon for him to meet men who had been acquaintances in the regiment or the university; and they often failed to remember his Roman title, and found the old one, as his mother's heir, rise naturally to their lips.

Prince Crivelli laughed.

"I'm glad," he said, "you forget my new name, for I have forgotten yours."

"Lady Benbecula. My husband's new coronet came home about five months ago. You know he is the Governor of Van Teufel's Land: or probably you know nothing about it. But he is . . . And you—you are the Prince of—of . . ."

He laughed.

"Rojate."

"Yes! Rojate. It's not so easy as some Italian names to remember. But why shouldn't we stick to our old ways. You always called me Priss. I think everyone called me Priss till I became a Governor's wife. And I'm afraid I always called you Kilbeg."

"I dare say, I was very cheeky."

"You mean *I* was. Most likely! But it really is delightful to see you again. I'm on my way home with this young person, who is now five, and the Van Teufel climate is not good for children. So I'm paying a short visit to Europe, and taking her to her grandmother. We landed at Brindisi the day before yesterday. I wish you'd show me Rome."

"Let me show you one house in it to-night. My wife has a reception. Do come."

"Certainly. Where do you live?"

He laughed again. He felt sure his wife's absence at that moment was providential. Ascania would

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have been hard to convince that anyone in honest ignorance could think it necessary to ask the head of the Crivelli for his *address* in Rome !

But the Prince gave the fullest information, knowing well it was wholly unnecessary.

Meanwhile Ascania had driven out of sight, nor did she reappear. After a very short chat Lady Benbecula and her little girl drove away, and Luigi walked across the grass to the place at which he had suggested that his wife should pick him up. From the time he had got out of the carriage to the time he reached this place just seven minutes had elapsed. Driving round by the palace, it should have taken the Princess about the same time. But Ascania had not the least intention of coming back that way for her husband. At the turning close to the palace the coachman, who had, of course, heard his master's suggestion, prepared to take the necessary direction, but the Princess leant forward and bade him turn the other way.

" . . . drive on the Pincio for quarter of an hour," she said, " and then to the Palazzo Castagna."

Five minutes afterwards she spoke again.

" It is going to rain," she called out. " I will have the hood of the Victoria put up."

Then while the footman was doing this she added—

" If it rains I will not go to the Pincio. Tell him to drive straight to the Castagna Palace."

On the little seat in front of her were her husband's overcoat and umbrella, which of course he had not taken with him when he left the carriage—for five minutes as he thought.

He had a horrible cold as it was, being, in fact, very liable to most severe colds ever since he had come to Rome, and a wetting was certainly not likely to improve it.

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Ascania was quite aware of this, but at present her intentions were punitive.

As for Prince Crivelli he was not long in guessing them. The petty experience of five years was not likely to be thrown away on so clever a man. For though the fact has not yet been mentioned, the young Prince though he had married Ascania, was a very unusually clever person.

For nearly ten minutes he waited. Then, fully understanding what had happened, he turned to walk back into the city.

Ascania was keenly alive to the fact that her method of punishment was singularly well chosen. For, except for the exigencies of sport, her husband detested walking. Some people look upon gratuitous fatigue as the noblest of all pleasures, but Luigi thought it senseless, and never willingly suffered it.

To tell the truth, he was always fonder of riding than walking, and in the saddle it was hard to fatigue him.

Nor did he enjoy getting wet through merely because it was a stormy-tempered woman's whimsey of petty revenge to drive off and leave him.

The physical annoyance, however, was light in comparison to the disgust it gave him to think that it should be a pleasure to the woman he would wish to respect so to treat him.

The shower was a very sharp one, and, before he entered Rome again by the Flaminian Gate, the Prince of Rojate was exceedingly wet. His suit and boots were thin, for when his wife carried him off driving it usually ended in his being taken for a round of calls. He was probably the only husband in Rome who was ever dragged round on this duty. Ascania scarcely ever did it alone, and no

other five-years-married lady ever did it except alone.

Of course, Luigi did not forget that he might just as well have gone to the Villa Fieschi as he had intended, and settled his business with Don Sinibaldo. But what he particularly disliked was walking with neither stick nor umbrella in his hand. To a man who always carries one nothing is more uncomfortable than to walk without.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Lady Benbecula began her instructions that evening as to the address to which she wished to be driven, the hall-porter of her hotel looked compassionate.

"Everybody in Rome knows the Palazzo Crivelli," he assured her.

And when she saw how big it was, she realised that he had probably told the truth. As it had stood there ever since Urban III. built it, in 1186, its whereabouts would, perhaps, have been well known even had it been no bigger than the Palazetto Castagna, where Ascania's mother lived.

So many English writers have described Roman palaces since Mr. Marion Crawford set the fashion, that by me the reader may be spared.

Though large, the Crivelli Palace was by no means among the largest in Rome, and for the rest it was distinguished chiefly by the surprising cleanliness of its grand staircase and by the comfortable, inhabited air of its apartments.

Ascania received Lady Benbecula almost with tenderness. It was her habit to squeeze people's hands, whether she liked them or not, and her short-sightedness caused her to adopt, while talking, a proximity that seemed very intimate, especially as such proximity made it natural for her to speak in quite a confidential tone.

The young Princess was not yet fat enough to be coarse, and though already alarmingly altered from

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the almost beautiful girl she had been half a dozen years ago, was still pretty enough to be sensibly attractive. And her dress and her diamonds were, if anything, a thought too princely. Lady Benbecula made up her mind to like her, as Rome had done, and with much the same careless, superficial indifference.

The scene was novel enough to be amusing, and Lady Benbecula soon found a comfortable post of observation. Hard by two ladies were talking in English, and she unscrupulously played eavesdropper. As she perceived, the elder woman's knowledge of Rome was extensive and peculiar, like Mr. Weller's of London. Both were English, but the didactic lady had evidently been a Roman by adoption for an almost geological period. Her niece, as the younger shortly proved to be, was a visitor.

"That man is Don Paolino Scolari. His brother is head of one of the great papal families. Clement III. was their pope. And the lady he's talking to is the Principessa di Corsignano. She was Donna Claricia Scotti, and both she and her husband are of papal families."

"You mean families that want the pope to get back the temporal power?"

"Oh, no! We all want that—Protestants and all—whatever we may pretend or our principles may be. The Quirinal and the King utterly spoil Rome.* . . . A papal family means one of those that have given a pope to the dynasty of St. Peter. The Corsignano princes are Piccolomini. Æneas Sylvius was their pope: he wrote novels and things. But that was a good while ago; it's all less amusing now."

* The date of this story is supposed to be the last decade of the last century. The White Party in Rome have achieved a great social advance in the last eight or ten years.

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“ Are the Crivelli a papal family ? ”

“ Yes ; Urban III. was their man. Those are his arms up there ; and up in the vault you can see him and the emperor bully-ragging. Any self-respecting pope in those days spent his time excommunicating the emperor.”

“ And the Princess ? Who was she ? ”

“ She was Donna Ascania della Castagna, and her father is Duke of San Stefano. They were a papal family too ; but not much of a one, for their pope only reigned twelve days, and with the best intentions in the world, could not carry nepotism very far in that time.”

“ She ’s pretty, don’t you think ? ” observed the niece, whose interest appeared to lie more in the present day.

“ She *was*, if you like. But they ’re *both* altered a lot since their marriage. She ’s getting pillowy, and will be hopelessly fat in a year or two. She ’s not a bit like a Castagna, but like her mother’s people. They ’re Sicilians, and that means that after youth they are either brown bags of bones or brown bladders of fat.”

“ Oh, Aunt Maria ! *Don’t !* ”

“ I can’t help it. I tell the truth as God reveals it to me ; the language, however, is mine. I don’t pretend to verbal inspiration. . . . ”

“ *Aunt Maria !* ”

“ Well, what ’s the matter ? Ascania, as you see, is bound for the port of fat : her mother—there she is, talking to a Monsignore—has already attained the bone-bag alternative. She likes chattering to the priests, for she can then gossip as badly as she wants and still go to Communion in the morning, for she pretends to herself she only does it to get them to pray for the poor sinners.”

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“ Aunt *Maria* !!! ”

“ It ’s no use going on saying *Aunt Maria*. I ’m only describing the types. Under me you ’ll learn your Rome without prejudice and without waste of time. Duchessa di San Stefano’s type is common enough all over Italy ; it ’s not particularly Roman. When she wants a new under-housemaid she prays to Sant Espedito. He ’s a new saint, and she thinks he ’ll not have so much on hand as the old ones ; and so far he has only been taken up by the poor people, so she feels sure he ’ll be rather flattered by her notice. If the new housemaid is a success, she gives the smallest and thinnest silver woman she can buy to his altar. For all the Castagna are stingy.”

For a very brief interval there was silence. Then the younger lady remarked contentedly—

“ I must say it ’s all most interesting . . . so Roman.”

“ Well, it ’s as Roman as anything you can get nowadays. Nothing ’s really Roman now. The Casa Crivelli was never very Black, either, and no one knows whether our host is Black at all. He never goes to the Quirinal ; but he always takes off his hat to the Queen and the Princess of Naples if he sees them in the Corsa or the Villa Borghese.”

“ But surely—doesn’t everyone ? ”

“ Of course not. Your true Black looks along his nose, and takes no notice.”

“ As if he was a black elsewhere.”

“ . . . Though, of course,” added Aunt Maria, with a side-glance, “ the pope no longer *insists* on their putting out their tongues at the Royal Family of Sardinia.”

“ I don’t believe a word of it,” declared the niece, who took life very seriously, “ and after living such years in Rome, I never thought you ’d be so bigoted.

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You seem to believe every absurd story they tell you against the Catholics."

Aunt Maria was obviously delighted. She was a cheerful old heathen, who did not take life seriously at all.

"Bigoted, my dear child! After nearly thirty years in Rome I defy anyone to be bigoted. One has to be a Catholic or nothing."

"And, Aunt Maria, you're not a Catholic. *Do you mean to say you're nothing?*"

But Aunt Maria laughed cheerfully.

"Far from it. I'm Lady Anna Maria Boleyn, and that's far from nothing here, as you will find when you know your bearings better."

There was another rather longer silence, during which the younger lady looked depressed, the elder urbanely serene.

"Look!" she said at last, "that's the Prince."

"Prince Crivelli, our host? Which? The haughty-looking, very dark man by the door, just shaking hands with a lady?"

"No! That's Giulio Papareschi . . . but the Prince of Rojate is close to him, leaning against the door-post . . ."

"With his hands in his pockets?"

Aunt Maria laughed.

"Yes. Rome is nearly as much shocked by it as you: or, rather, it used to be. Everyone likes him so much that they are beginning to condone it. In fact, some of the very Anglophile young men are trying to learn it."

"He doesn't look a bit like one's idea of a Roman prince."

"What do you think he looks like?"

"Oh, anybody—an English officer, perhaps—an English officer with a university qualification."

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"Gladys, you've kindled hope in my breast. I like the 'university qualification' . . . Five minutes ago I was afraid we'd at last got a fool in our family. I ought to have known better."

Lady Benbecula wondered if the girl was sharp enough to realise that Lady Anna Maria Boleyn was being unwontedly complimentary. She had never seen her before, but she was fully alive to it.

"Don't you think him good-looking?"

"Oh, yes, he is certainly nice-looking," replied the niece without conviction. She could not at once pardon his fair skin and neutral colouring: moreover, she was a blonde herself.

"He *could* not look as nice as he *is*," declared Aunt Maria with fervour, "so it would be absurd to expect it. But in all my life I don't remember any man whose appearance seemed to me so *satisfactory*. Certainly none so interesting."

The young lady looked surprised. She was herself so young as to be seldom enthusiastic; and the Prince of Rojate, it seemed to her, was an odd person to be enthusiastic about. Lady Benbecula listened approvingly.

"His face," continued the old lady, "is eloquent and reticent. It hints at how much there is to tell, and stops short at telling anything."

"It does not seem to tell much."

"It doesn't mean to. He never will. Some people tell everything—I do. Because there's nothing that matters to tell. Other people scarcely take even themselves into their confidence; they are too—well, 'shy' is not a good word."

"The Prince certainly doesn't look shy."

"There is one sort of sensitiveness that is shyness *boned* of its vanity. He is cruelly sensitive."

"'Cruelly'?"

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“ I mean it makes it so easy to be cruel to him—for his wife, for instance.”

As it happened, the Princess of Rojate was moving towards them. Lady Gladys bent a leisurely glance on her.

“ That sort of immovably selfish woman finds a perennial pleasure in small cruelties,” she observed quietly.

Aunt Maria looked delighted. Lady Benbecula felt herself surprised.

“ Who told you,” demanded the old lady, “ that Ascania was selfish ? She hasn’t been particularly found out.”

“ She tells me herself.”

Lady Gladys sent another glance to meet the Princess, and Lady Anna Maria followed it.

“ I ’m glad you ’ve taken a prejudice against our dear Ascania,” she said.

“ Oh . . . it isn’t a prejudice.”

“ No, my dear. You ’re not such a fool as you look. It ’s a revelation.”

Lady Gladys laughed.

“ A fool does as well as anyone else for revelations : one only has to sit still and be receptive enough.”

CHAPTER VI.

LADY BENBECULA was interested. She watched Prince Crivelli as he leant against the door-post, and began to realise that he was a very uncommon person. What it was that made him so she was trying to understand. Then she looked at his wife, and without relinquishing the easy sort of liking she had taken for her at first, felt that she was adopting towards her that attitude that Lady Gladys had refused to call a prejudice.

Lady Gladys herself was in the receipt of another revelation, but this time she kept it to herself. For a dozen seconds or less the Prince of Rojate had watched his wife as she came towards him.

“ She is his crucifixion ! ” the girl told herself.

He brought his eyes away from his wife’s face, they passed by those of Lady Gladys without pause, for he did not know her, then met Lady Benbecula’s.

He came forward immediately. As he did so, a peculiar air of fatigue seemed to be cast aside, an air that almost always was noticeable about him when standing still.

Prince Crivelli had a singularly perfect figure—so well proportioned, that one never asked whether he were tall or no. He was slight rather than thin, and in his slimness there was no suggestion of weakness. But for the last five years an unmistakable air of being tired had come upon him : one could not decide whether it meant actual physical weariness

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or a fatigue of spirit : whichever it was, it slowly but steadily increased with time, and it was always most apparent when he was doing nothing.

" I have been looking for you for a quarter of an hour," he said, looking down into Lady Benbecula's face with friendly satisfaction in her company. " I was afraid you hadn't come."

" I came nearly twenty minutes ago, and most of the time I've been listening to your praises. I saw the Princess though I didn't see you : or, rather, I saw you but you didn't see me."

It sounded as if she had been subjected to conjugal laudations. He felt incredulous, but said nothing. Perhaps Priss had acquired the habit of this sort of, not uncommon, mendacious compliment. As the wife of a Colonial Governor, a soothing insincerity might not seem to her out of place.

" I am waiting here," he explained, " to go down, as soon as they tell me he is at the door, and receive Cardinal Crivelli, my uncle."

" Is that the etiquette ? "

" Yes. You will see. It is rather a picturesque custom. My wife receives him just there."

At that moment the Princess espied her husband, and she instantly commanded his presence with a slight but very unmistakable gesture.

" Excuse me," he said, " I must join her. We must have a good talk later on."

Lady Benbecula smiled and nodded. He turned at once to Ascania, and looked down into her eyes with his habitual indulgent friendliness. It was the effort of his life to take her for granted as a child, and never to be betrayed into judging her as one would a reasonable adult human being. Yet Ascania was twenty-seven, and had been no child at

seventeen, except in perverse, intractable naughtiness.

"Of course, you're *always* out of the way when you are wanted!" she burst out.

Still he smiled, with patient refusal to notice her peevishness and unreason.

"It's flattering to be wanted so often," he remarked.

"P-foo! What nonsense you do talk always. How tiresome it is to be never serious."

The mildest of men object to being lectured, even deservedly, in public; and they were surrounded by listeners who could mostly understand English sufficiently to recognise a scolding when they heard it—not that Ascania's tone rendered even the most superficial acquaintance with English necessary to enable them to recognise that much. And if the reader has supposed that Luigi Crivelli was the mildest of men the writer is to blame. He was sweet-tempered to an uncommon degree, but meek he was not. Only he had long ago decided that for him, being a man, a patient indulgence of his wife's unending irritations was incumbent. This, he thought, was the destined daily exercise of his manliness, to bear and be silent, as the rock is silent for all the noisy fretting and assault of the ever recurrent tide.

He may in reality have been wrong, but it was a fine delusion. If Ascania could have married a handsome navvy, with a big, lusty body and a profuse expression of animal affection for herself, she would have made him a good enough wife of her type, and would not have thought much the worse of him because he vented his occasional outbursts of passion in blows and obsecrations. While being beaten she would, no doubt, have wept very noisily;

but when he had beaten her enough, he would soon have been able to dry her tears with a few equally noisy kisses.

Such a husband might very possibly have played her false as frequently as opportunity might present itself. But his infidelities would have been easily condoned and soon forgotten, especially if she had found that any attempt at resentment on her part drew down swift physical chastisement and a subsequent period of punitive neglect.

As it was, the refinement of her husband's nature was a perpetual offence to her. It positively annoyed her that he was not the mere sporting character, and no more, that superficial acquaintance fancied him. His devotion to literature bored her, and she would always interrupt his reading if she could. Almost everything he did was wrong. And though he had been without exception ever since their marriage the most loyally faithful of husbands, she spent her time rushing from one furious jealousy to another.

If she had married the navy, this tragedy would never have had to be written.

No doubt the scolding would have been much more protracted—Ascania had got together quite a rosary of disagreeable things to say ; but before she could get out half of them the Cardinal's arrival was announced. Still, she had time to inform her husband that Lady Benbecula was vulgar and as hideous as a devil, that she certainly dyed her hair (what little of it grew on her head), and her feet were like boats. With these and a few other equally flattering criticisms of his old friend scratching his memory like dirty pins, Luigi Crivelli went downstairs to receive His Eminence the Cardinal Bishop of Sabina.

CHAPTER VII.

THE reception of the prince of the church was, as Luigi had said, picturesque and interesting. But what interested Lady Benbecula most was to contrast and compare the two principal figures concerned in it.

A cardinal created by Pius IX. was not likely to be young in the year of his successor's second or episcopal jubilee. But Cardinal Crivelli looked a little older than he was. He had no appearance of feebleness or senility. His step was firm still and decided, though gentle and deliberate ; his eyes were singularly clear, and their outlook upon the world was direct, observant, and calm. He held himself well, and in his really princely bearing there was none of that rather sad suggestion of fatigue, whether of body or spirit, that has been noticed in his nephew. His hair, though white, was still abundant, and his slim hands had none of the claw-like leanness of old age.

But there were certain signs of age that are not the commonest. And some of these made people, who were fond of tracing likenesses, declare that the Cardinal was like his late master, Pius IX.

There was, in truth, no resemblance ; but they had in common an expression of sweetness and tenderness that would have rendered beautiful any face ; and both Pope and Cardinal had beautiful faces even according to the ordinary standard, that is not guided so much by the meaning as by the features. One

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very rarely sees, except on the countenance of the old, just that look of all-indulgent benignity. It comes, one would think, with the patient learning of years to those who draw so near to God as to love all men. It grows out of no indolence of optimism, but from the quiet, humble, gradual faculty of interpretation of the great human secret to which each of us, best and worse, is part of the much twisted clue.

“Are they not alike?” asked Lady Anna Maria.

Her niece laughed softly.

“Yes. It’s really conceited of them to be so fond of each other.”

That they were so a stupider person than Lady Gladys might have perceived.

“But,” she added, “the Cardinal has a more peaceful expression.”

“His Eminence,” retorted Aunt Maria, “is a bachelor.”

“What is it so—so *unusual* in both their faces?” asked Lady Gladys. “Something singular? Ah, yes! an absolute reluctance to give pain.”

The old lady turned swiftly to her niece.

“Gladys,” she said, “you’re a jewel. I’ll eat as much dirt as you choose to offer me.”

The young lady laughed.

“Aunt Maria, I believe you’re in love with the Prince of Rojate.”

Without doubt Lady Anna Maria blushed. A woman who can still blush at sixty-five must have some good in her.

“I’m not the least ashamed of it,” she declared stoutly.

“Only,” she added savagely, “it’s a pity it’s not his wife.”

“Isn’t she?”

“I dare say she thinks so. She likes his good

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looks, and she 's not without attachment to his long legs ; but she has never loved anyone but his wife, and she never will."

After another brief pause, she added—

"They are, as you pointed out, a very well-assorted couple."

"I!!!"

Aunt Maria nodded.

"Exactly. In all Rome no one is so reluctant to cause pain as he, and no one so willing to cause him pain as she."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the girl. "I should be extremely jealous of you if I were the Princess."

"Not you! I was quite wrong about your being the fool of the family . . . and though I hate her, as you say, I also rather like her: everyone does in Rome."

"I suppose," hazarded Lady Gladys, "she's good-natured."

"Not a bit. I've heard her say the most wantonly unkind things about her chosen intimates. But she laughs so much (never at anything humorous) that she has a spurious reputation for being cheery. I expect Luigi could tell a different tale."

"I must admit she has no appearance of depression."

"She never opens a book, and has nothing to fall back upon. Out of the giddy throng, she sinks into querulous *ennui*."

"To my knowledge," observed her niece, "I've never been in company with a saint; but if you told me Cardinal Crivelli was one I shouldn't mind."

"And what surprises me is that I find nothing offensive in it."

Both women laughed—the old heathen, who looked back on life, with a half bitter, cheerful grin,

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and the young believer in life's possibilities, who looked forward with a solemn hope.

They had long ago moved away from their station near the door. Presently, in another room, they found themselves near a secluded and umbrageous balcony.

"There," whispered Lady Anna Maria, with a verbal nudge that was so unmistakable as to be almost physical, "there she is, sitting there in the dark with young Fairfax, the most flirtatious man south of the Alps."

"Really," observed her niece, "it's not our business."

"Of course, that's why we mind it. But I am speaking on behalf of abstract justice. If poor Luigi sat in a sequestered balcony with *me*—nay, I will go further, with *you* even, *when* would he hear the end of it?"

"I must say by your showing the Prince seems amiable but a little weak."

The old lady turned savagely.

"Don't say that again," she commanded roughly, "or I shall go back to my first position about your acumen. Aren't you, after all, clever enough to realise that a man may be so unusual as to bear things because he is *strong*?"

"Dear Aunt Maria," said the girl, "have patience, and I will learn to admire him as much as you. He must be worth it, or he could never have earned such a partisan."

"All right," said Lady Anna Maria, adding with barefaced inconsistency, "All the same, if he had a grain of sense he'd (excuse the word; I seldom sink into slang), he'd wallop her . . . As St. Pau says, it might not be lawful, but it would be admirably expedient."

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"Is that the local version? In my translation St. Paul . . ."

"Oh, my dear child, St. Paul and I understand each other perfectly. For goodness sake, don't explain him to me!"

As it happened, Prince Crivelli himself, five minutes later, passed the arched opening on to the balcony. A curtain usually looped back had been in the meanwhile loosened out, so that one could no longer see Ascania or her friend from the room. But as he went by Luigi heard her voice.

". . . Donna Barbara—Gigi's sister—is going to be married," said Ascania, "to a Lord Strach-an-garroch. P-foo! What names! I don't know if you pronounce it that. Eh? It's a secret, and Gigi does not know I know . . ."

He walked on quickly, having no desire at all to surprise her secrets as she had done his. He did not know, or care much to know, who was her companion. But he was sure it was a man. Ascania never wasted nocturnal *tête-à-tête* confidences on her own sex, though she didn't dislike them in the forenoon. So far it was a good thing—a man might hold his tongue; it depended, of course, entirely on the man. Had he known it was Fairfax he would have been easy enough on that score, for that diplomatist, though flirtatious, was not talkative or indiscreet. But Luigi was too proud to pause even the brief necessary moment to hear whose voice came in response to Ascania's. He walked on, and he was undeniably angry. It was extremely annoying that she should have come to know this, and unpardonable that she should betray her ill-gotten knowledge. For it was quite certain that she had only got hold of the "secret" by reading a letter never meant for her.

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She had often read his private letters before, and he knew well enough that she was always on the alert for chances of peeping into them and into his diary. But he seldom gave her the chance. Of what carelessness had he been guilty? It was strangely characteristic of his weary patience of her that even now, in his strong annoyance, his irritation was chiefly against himself for some supposed stupidity or lack of care. That she should be the prying, inquisitive poor creature she was, it was no use thinking of that; but it was unpardonable in himself not to have guarded successfully his sisters' confidence.

When Ascania said: "Gigi's sister, Donna Barbara" (she would have said Lady Barbara had she been speaking to a Roman), "is going to be married," she knew she was going beyond the facts she had nefariously got hold of. But it was impossible for her to restate anything without addition.

Her husband's sister was not even engaged; but she wished to be, and there were difficulties—that was why Lewis had been begged to regard all he was told as a confidence. Neither he nor his mother and sisters were people to make gratuitous "secrets."

Much as Ascania detested her sisters-in-law, it was not, to do her justice, because she detested them that she betrayed their confidences. She would have done the same had she loved them . . . to call "love" the sentiment she had for her own family. This feeling chiefly showed itself in an habitual craving for the society of her mother and near relations in their unavoidable absence, and a speedy weariness of their company when present. She found them really dull and tiresome, but would have been furious if Gigi had hinted that even conceivably they could be tedious.

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He was far too wise, and was hospitality itself towards all his family-in-law. So that sometimes Ascania would roughly step in and refuse to permit their acceptance of his invitations, when anyone more lively happened to be expected.

She was much more proud of belonging by marriage to the Illustrissima Casa Crivelli than of being by birth a daughter of the Most Excellent House of Castagna, a sentiment she was at no pains to conceal when alone with her own family. But with her husband's she affected to call the Crivelli of his branch "mongrels" and "three-quarters English," from which Englishness, again, in general Roman society she took no little glory.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WE have not had our talk, after all," said Prince Crivelli as Lady Benbecula took her leave of him.

"No; it was always impossible. We should not have promised ourselves so unreasonable a pleasure. With the number of guests you have had here to-night, quarter of a minute was more than the due of one."

"Much more."

"I suppose," said Lady Benbecula, "it would be quite out of the question for you to come with me to-morrow morning (or is it this morning?) to some of the places I have to look at—say the Vatican, or the Colosseum? Then I could kill two birds with one stone—see what I ought to see, and hear what I want to hear."

"*This* is the proper time to see the Colosseum," observed Luigi, "and there is the proper moon."

"Shall we go?" laughed Lady Benbecula, no more meaning it than he did.

"It would be delightful. But I'm afraid I can't even come to-morrow morning either. But won't you come to luncheon here?"

After she had gone away, Lady Benbecula had a misgiving that she had accepted this invitation rather too readily. She was herself a singularly direct person, without *arrière-pensée*, and, indeed, without forethought on occasion likewise. Her diplomatic training out in Van Teufel's Land had not been very severe; there was much good-natured vice-loyalty,

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to herself and her husband, and she had not found the task of pleasing very arduous.

But now it did strike her that her old friend had rather asked her to luncheon as the easiest way of eluding her own proposal for a meeting than because he had himself desired her company.

Yet she was sure he was as nice as ever, and did not for a moment accuse him of unfriendliness or chilliness to an old acquaintance.

About the same time Ascania was making herself singularly unpleasant to her husband in his own room. He had never dreamed of resenting her habitual invasions of his peculiar territory, but he disliked it none the less. "At home" they had always held their own quarters sacred, and mother, sisters and brothers each had their own sitting-room. Of course, they often were in each other's, but never without some sort of implied invitation. Roman custom was not Ascania's excuse, for though a young husband might often enough be found in his wife's boudoir, the wife was not apt to trespass into her husband's private room.

If Ascania's invasions had been less belligerent, they might have been somewhat more tolerable.

On this occasion she affected surprise at finding him.

"Yes, here I am. Did you want me?"

"P-foo! What should I want? But I came to see if you were here."

Luigi was reading, an exercise of his that invariably determined his wife to interrupt. He did not see that any particular good was to be got by making any rejoinder to her remark, and read on a line or two.

"So you didn't go to the Colosseum?"

He looked up in annoyed surprise.

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"With Lady Ben . . . p-foo ! I can't say her name."

"It seems obvious I did not," he answered quietly, "if you can believe your own eyes ; though really, Ascania, it seems to me sometimes as if you would rather not believe even them if they insisted on your not being foolish. I perceive you are already jealous of Lady Benbecula."

"Jealous ! of that craggy, ugly, vulgar peasant !"

"It does make it a little unreasonable, I admit," he said.

Evidently he was tired out. Scarcely did he argue even to this extent with Ascania. That young woman was watching him through her pince-nez, which had a giraffe-like leg covered with diamonds.

"Gigi, *how* ugly you become !" she observed candidly.

"I never laid very loud claims to personal beauty, did I ?" he replied, welcoming the diversion too obviously.

"Poof ! You're as conceited as an ape of your hands, and your expression."

"*What* an overrated man was Job !" laughed Prince Crivelli, and his wife gauged his tone well enough to feel that she had not been very successful. At the same time, it is not pretended that he really enjoyed these acrid personalities.

"You will have to write to that woman and put her off. I am engaged to lunch out."

Prince Crivelli knew perfectly that the engagement was a figment of the brain, and that his wife would go and breakfast with her mother if he yielded to this, or barefacedly remain at home once her point was gained.

"Look here, Ascania, I can't be rude, even to please you, to Lady Benbecula : she is one of the

oldest friends I have. If you are lunching out, I will get Zia to come and chaperon us ; and she can bring that toady of hers as well, if she likes."

Zia was the dowager princess, his uncle's widow.

" Pfoo ! How I hate Zia ! She bores me so, and she is so ugly I cannot eat with her, there."

Luigi was too merciful to point out that this could hardly matter, as Ascania was not to be present.

" Your mother would do even better, only I thought, perhaps, you were lunching there."

In plainest English, this meant that the very fullest opportunities for espionage and critical chaperonage were being offered. But Ascania did not intend to accept anything short of unconditional surrender.

" I have changed my mind," she said, and an expression he knew very well hardened in her eyes : it was mulish, but it was serpentine. " I will not go out to luncheon : I will receive this woman since she has to come . . . and you will see how she enjoy herself."

He certainly had no difficulty in recollecting occasions on which she had made herself so objectionable to friends of his, that even now he could not think of it without a hot sense of angry shame.

He had got up from his low chair some time ago, and was standing with his back to the huge open hearth, on which a log smouldered. He put his book down now, open, upon a table where the light of the shaded lamp fell on it.

His wife was moving about the room, fidgeting with everything she could handle. Over his head, above the fireplace, hung a peculiarly lovely portrait : it was of a woman, young, slender, graceful, tender, and exquisitely refined. Nothing could be prouder than the lips, but nothing more sensitive. Was Luigi's mouth like that behind his moustache ? For

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the likeness between them was marvellous—marvellous because it triumphed over difference of sex, difference of colouring—for the lady was sombrely dark—and some difference of feature.

Out of the gloom the pictured lady looked down upon him with a sort of sad approval, an angry tenderness.

“My dear Ascania,” said the Prince, “you shall certainly not have the opportunity of being disagreeable to Lady Benbecula in your own house. I will put her off.”

Ascania laughed like a hyena, and yet had time to notice with complacency that he called the house hers, where another man would certainly have called it his.

“P-foo! What a fool you are, Gigi!” she cried. “That is all what I wanted.”

“She shall certainly not lunch here,” he added quietly, and still the pictured lady watched with melancholy approbation. “I will give her luncheon somewhere else. We shall be able to have our talk about old times without boring you.”

Ascania turned sharp and fixed him with her gleaming glasses, then burst out—

“You—you most horrible beast! You filthy, beastly pig! How I hate you! Good God, how I wish I could tell you how I hate you . . .”

That was but the prelude; nay, the mere tuning of the instruments. For ten minutes she raved. Her stock of Billingsgate, even in Italian, was dull and monotonous, but it was full-flavoured. It always made her husband feel that he was being pelted with rotten eggs and fish.

There was, of course, nothing tragic in the position. An angry, railing woman intruded by a destiny that had certainly been blind into high position; a young

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man in modern costume with his hands in his pockets, as patient and as silent as a sad, lonely rock in a cold hurricane. But the pictured lady watched with eyes that were full of tragedy, and for all their blackness, they were like her grandnephew's grey ones. Behind their hopelessness lay a worse misery of scorn ; and far behind the patience of Prince Crivelli's face there crept a shadow of scorn too.

They both annoyed Ascania—the living man and the dead woman's picture. They had secrets from her, secrets they could not tell her if they would—how to be what they were, how not to be what she was, how to look like that. For Ascania would have given more than all the beauty she had ever possessed for a certain air that breathed about the face and figure of Donna Lucrezia dei Crivelli—by marriage Princess of Torre Nero—even if she had to take the air without the princess's passionate loveliness.

In her hand Ascania had a book : she had picked it up just now from one of the tables, and held it still, inadvertently. Suddenly Prince Crivelli saw that she had become aware of it, and that at the same moment it had come into her head to fling it at his face.

It was not a large book, but it had sharp silver corners, and was somewhat heavy for its size. It would certainly strike one a very disagreeable blow.

But her first intention was changed almost instantly, and the book was flung, and with considerable force. Not, however, at Luigi. It flew higher.

" There ! " cried Ascania. " That woman of your family how I can't bear her look ! She was a beast, and so she looks ! She murdered her husband, and you have her in your room ! The Crivelli might be ashamed of her, but you . . . "

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“None of the Crivelli have ever been ashamed of her,” interrupted the young man’s steady voice, “and I admire her very much. I am proud of her for murdering her husband.”

The book had struck the picture just upon the fingers of the right hand ; and the position of this was unusual, for it seemed as if the lady were lifting it to lay her finger on her lips, as one commanding, not beseeching, silence.

CHAPTER IX.

As it happened, Prince Crivelli did not give Lady Benbecula luncheon on the following day, nor did he have to make her any excuse for which his wife was responsible.

About half-past ten the Princess drove out, and she had not been gone ten minutes before a telegram was brought to her husband, which made it, in his opinion, necessary that he should leave Rome at once for Rojate. The message was to tell him that the old parish priest there was dying of a sudden seizure, and Don Pippo, as his people called him, was a favourite with the young Prince. While his things were being packed, he wrote a note to Ascania explaining his departure, and promising to return to Rome on the morrow, or at latest the day following. It so fell out that there were several matters of importance for him to transact at Rojate, and it seemed sensible to take this opportunity of attending to them. That the Princess would care to leave Rome at present was, he knew, so far out of the question that he did not suggest it to her.

He also wrote a note to Lady Benbecula, and as he was directing it a servant informed him that, if His Excellency pleased, Professor Doctor Gianelli would wish to be received by His Excellency.

The doctor was admitted without delay or question, his presence occasioning no surprise, for Gianpaolo had been out of sorts for a week or so, and no doubt

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it was in reference to the boy the physician desired to see the Prince.

"Six hundred pardons, Excellency," begged the doctor. "But as I was about to leave Don Gianpaolo his nurse chanced to mention that your Most Illustrious Excellency was on the point of leaving Rome for a few days. Now, if I may be pardoned, I was desiring more than anything that Don Gianpaolo could conveniently be taken to the country for a short change of the air . . . It is not anything at all he has . . . Nevertheless, he is debilitated, and the air of the hills would be like a miracle for His Excellency. If it could be arranged that he should accompany your Most Illustrious Excellency into the Sabina."

Yes, certainly it could and should be arranged, for Prince Crivelli readily perceived that the doctor, a straightforward, decisive young man, was quite in earnest in his desire that the boy should leave Rome for a day or two.

None the less, when Luigi was left alone, after giving the necessary orders, he was quite alive to the fact that there would be trouble.

There was then a train which left Rome for Valmontone at noon, and that train he meant to catch. But to communicate with Ascania before it should have departed would certainly be impossible. He opened his note to her, and added a postscript explaining what he was doing. But there was no chance of her getting it before half-past twelve: she would probably be shopping all morning.

On the way to the station Gianpaolo peeped out apprehensively. It was abundantly evident that he dreaded catching sight of his mother in every carriage they met. Still, it was only near the palace there was really the least chance of this. Ascania

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would assuredly have no business in the wilderness of new streets, called by malaprop North Italian names, that branch off from the Via Cavour or the Via Nazionale.

Even at the station the boy had the air of a half-escaped captive; and when the tickets had been taken, and he was really allowed to get into the train, he did so with a sigh of relieved anxiety that was rather pathetic, and was by no means lost on his father. The child's spirits rose the moment the train began to move. The Claudian Aqueducts were scarcely left behind before a brighter colour seemed to have come into his cheeks. Once out on the Campagna, it seemed as if the closeness and oppression of the city were forgotten, and their effect cast off.

Of course, it was a slow train, or it would not have stopped at Valmontone; but Gianpaolo was not at all impatient. At every station he saw something to amuse him. At Ciampino there was an astounding *contadino* trying to make two pigs and a goat go where he wanted, instead of forcing him to go where *they* wanted. At Palestrina a cardinal-bishop got out. There was a State carriage with gorgeous footmen waiting to drive him away.

At Valmontone their own carriage and footmen were waiting. Half a dozen people got out; the carabinieri saluted the Prince; the *capo stazione* chatted with the guard; an old woman arrived, running, and reproaching two entirely innocent saints for the delays which had made her late, and was stuffed into a carriage just as the train began to move and "Partenza" was called out for the third time. The train strolled gently off towards Naples, and Prince Crivelli and his little boy took

their places in the handsome old-fashioned carriage. Gianpaolo enjoyed the drive as much as he had liked the short journey in the train.

They had no tenants in Valmontone—it is all Colonna and Borghese property; but they were well known, and the *contadini* all saluted. The *parocco* was being shaved just inside a *salone* at the end of the street, where it melts into the country road. He came out to the doorstep and bowed repeatedly, with a dignity not consciously impaired by the lather that still covered one side of his face, or the rather dubious linen cloth the barber had fastened under his chin.

Gianpaolo laughed; but the Prince called out a friendly word or two of greeting, and the old priest was quite satisfied. Had he known that it was his own odd appearance that had made the child laugh he would not have cared. “Laugh at me if you like, only do not spit in my soup!” he would have said imperturbably. Don Cico, the *parocco*, was a philosopher of proverbs.

They left the little town, with its ramshackle cathedral perched on the flat summit of the rock, behind, Luigi pointing out the prehistoric Pelasgic foundations to his boy.

In the country they drove at first between high banks: on either side were woods with netted undergrowth, where brigands frequently harboured. Two footmen rode beside the carriage with carbines.

The road mounted continually; the valley in its windings became more visible. Southwards, where the train had gone, one could see Anagni—the old, old feudal town a grim stronghold of romance and history—Segni, Paliano, each mounted like a sentinel (as sentinels they had been) on its craggy steep.

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Over there, a little north by east, was Genazzano ; high, high up on the skyline, San Vito ; yonder Olevano, flinging itself headlong from the mountain-top into the valley.

They had got so high up now, that to the left they could see, through the broad mouth of the pass, the Campagna, like a heaving, though deathly silent, green sea, rolling away towards Rome. Behind them, across the wide valley, towered the empty Hernican hills ; in front the still lovelier range of their own Sabines.

No mountain road in the world could be much lovelier ; and the sharp clear air helped the sensation of freedom and escape that both the child and his father felt rising like a tide within them as they left the lowlands farther and farther behind. Rome seemed to recede into indefinite distance, though in reality there was scarcely more than forty miles between it and them.

From Valmontone Station to Rojate is nearly thirty kilometri, all uphill ; and though the horses were fine, like those of most of the Roman princes, the drive was a long one. They left Valmontone at quarter to two, and did not reach Olevano (the only village one passes between the two places) till nearly half past three. Outside the little town they stopped at the *albergo*, which stands at the end of its narrow vineyard, half a mile from the entrance of Olevano. Here Prince Crivelli decided to rest his horses and give Gianpaolo tea.

While they were waiting for it, in the queer little paved drawing-room upstairs, a neighbour walked in—Ercole di San Vito, the second son of the old Duke of Santo Speco. The two young men in a manner mutually explained their presence.

“ Of course, our people are all in Rome,” said

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Ercole, "and I hope to be by Thursday. But these *affari* to attend to at Santo Speco, and my father sent me. It would have been fairer to make Taddeo come, since he is the eldest. But catch him leaving the *circolo*!"

"I too had to come out to Rojate on business," said Prince Crivelli, "and the doctor begged me to bring Gianpaolo, who has been wanting a change of air."

Presently he asked Ercole to come back to Rojate with them, and the young man accepted with alacrity. He liked Luigi much better than the latter liked him. The fact was that Prince Crivelli was rather bored by young San Vito, who was an incorrigible chatterbox.

"Certainly I will come back with you. I only rode down here to get the letters for something to do. Santo Speco at this time of year is about as lively as when San Vito lived there."

Ercole alluded to the tradition that their feudal castle in the mountains took its name from a cavern hard by, sanctified by the residence in former ages of a local saint and hermit.

Luigi laughed.

"I can't promise that you will find Rojate very lively. There will only be Gianpaolo and myself."

As they passed the post office at the entrance of the *paex*. Don Ercole stopped to get the letters he had come for. The postmaster came out with a small bundle of circulars and such-like for Luigi. He was already known as an improving landlord, and they were mostly price lists of agricultural implements, patent manures, and drainage specialities. A telegram, said the official, had arrived an hour ago, but had been sent to the *castello*.

Driving through the indescribably picturesque,

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but inexpressibly dirty-looking little town, they turned abruptly to the right near the Camp Santo, and soon Rojate itself, perched on a spur of the mountains, came into view.

It was growing dusk, and the valley was already dark. Up here in the sky the last pale farewells of day were being said. The mountains loomed out against the steely blue of heaven, with their feet in a black sea of darkness. A dozen lights already crept into the windows of the little town. Over it and behind it hung the enormous black mass of the feudal castle, that seemed itself an outgrowth of the rock whereon it stood.

"I must say," observed Ercole di San Vito, "your place looks about as cheery as our own."

Luigi laughed, but did not join in Don Ercole's implied disapprobation. He liked Rojate, and in all its moods it interested him. Englishman as his Roman friends were half disposed to consider him, the inherited sympathies and affections of a thousand years bound him to these wild hills.

The Castello of Rojate is entered by a long drawbridge, and over this the carriage was soon rumbling. It did not span a moat, but the narrow, precipitous ravine which rendered a moat unnecessary.

At the end of the bridge stood a bronze statue of Urban III., of heroic size, standing in an attitude rather of menace to the hostile intruder than of benediction to the peaceful inhabitant of this eyrie of his race.

CHAPTER X.

As the postmaster had said, there was a telegram awaiting Prince Crivelli. It was from the Princess, and had been dispatched in one of her mildest fits of passion. Few people are willing to expose their violent temper in an open dispatch : it is the object of most of us to conceal in a telegram all that we may feel of anger or joy, grief or anxiety. No such delicate sense of reticence restrained Ascania. She had written the words in a fury, and she wanted their recipient to be fully alive to the fact. That others through whose hands the message must pass would also be aware of the same thing did not deter her at all.

She had been angry with her husband to start with, his determination to give luncheon to Lady Benbecula having infuriated her. His decision to go to Rojate, which she learned sooner than he had expected, had simply driven her out of herself.

Scarcely quarter of an hour before the train left the Roman station she had suddenly decided to go home for something, and had then been given Luigi's note. It instantly made her furious.

She suddenly became aware of the following facts : (1) that there could be no business whatever for Luigi to do at Rojate ; (2) that he had some secret affair there to attend to ; (3) that the air of the mountains at this season, so far from being likely to benefit Gianpaolo must do him harm, and would probably kill him ; (4) that she herself needed

change, and that no one had asked if *she* would like to change the air of Rome for that of the Sabina ; (5) that there was some mysterious connection between the sudden spiriting away of Gianpaolo and his father's *real* business at Rojate.

At which moment her surmises, if so calm-sounding a word can be used in reference to Ascania's passionate excursions into the realms of absolutely lawless conjecture, were interrupted—or shall we say assisted?—by the entrance of Gianpaolo's Sicilian nurse.

The child had two, the elder by a few years being this woman, who came from San Stefano, near Monreale, in Sicily, an importation of the Duchessa's, Ascania's mother. The younger nurse, Marasca, was from Rojate.

For a couple of days Giazza, the elder woman, had declared herself to be ill, and this morning had remained in bed. When the Prince had decided to go to Rojate, she had been not only in bed but asleep. He had therefore taken Marasca, and was possibly quite content to do so. He knew nothing much of either girl, but felt a certain repugnance towards the Sicilian, of which feeling she herself was much more aware than he was. He quite remembered that Marasca's home was at Rojate, and was not sorry she should have the chance of seeing her relations. For the sake of all concerned, it was as unlucky as it was true that Marasca was a very beautiful girl.

When Giazza awoke, which she only did when they brought her her dinner in bed, she was told of the departure of the Prince and of his son for Rojate, and of Marasca's having been taken thither in charge of the child. This was not many minutes before the Princess herself arrived at the palace ; and Giazza's

fury was as unrestrained and really a few degrees more vulgar than the rage of her mistress. She instantly dressed herself, and betook herself to the nursery, where she found the Princess with her husband's note clenched in her hand.

Within five minutes the woman had given Ascania a theory as to the reason of Luigi's flight, and the reason for his having taken Gianpaolo—to take Marasca away into the unobserved seclusion of the mountains. Of course, the Sicilian did not say this but she not only made Ascania believe that she felt it, but made that astounding noblewoman say so.

It was already twelve o'clock. The train for Valmontone, as Ascania well knew, was even now due to start. It would be impossible to get to the railway station, at the other end of Rome, before it should have started, making all possible allowance for the unpunctual departures of southern trains. Also Ascania wanted her luncheon. She ordered it up at once, and by half-past twelve was eating it with considerable appetite and enjoyment. Meanwhile she had telegraphed.

That night she was engaged to a ball, and this the Prince had forgotten. She did not really mind going without him, but at present she chewed the end of that additional grievance till it choked her. Driving to her mother's after luncheon, she saw a certain Ginlio Gonfalone, on whose allegiance she generally counted, in a carriage with her own cousin, Donna Ginta del Torre Nero, whom Ascania detested. Donna Ginta was certainly like Princess Crivelli, but two years younger and undoubtedly slimmer.

Her mother was in, but laid up with a migraine ; and Ascania, who liked fresh air and hated to have to sympathise, would not stay long in her mother's stuffy room, where there was no fire, but where all

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Does the reader suppose the Princess of Rojate believed a word of this? Or does he think it unnatural to ascribe to her such feelings, when in her heart of hearts, if she had had one, she would have known how baseless and monstrous the whole vulgar accusation was?

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY in the forenoon of the next day a second telegram was delivered to Prince Crivelli from his wife. It was a little shorter than the first, but not less impassioned : the Princess herself was coming to Rojate, and the train leaving Rome at midday was to be met at Valmontone.

To say that Luigi was surprised would be to asperse his intelligence. What reasonable person could be surprised at any unreasonable thing Ascania might do ? He had long ago learned that to consider any ordinary motive of conduct or decision, in reference to what his wife might do or decide, was a profitless irrelevance.

Otherwise it would be astonishing that Ascania should tear herself, even for a day or two, from the pleasures of Rome at their height in the month of February.

He ordered the carriage which he thought she would prefer to be at Valmontone by half-past twelve. The horses would thus have an hour in which to rest before beginning the long, uphill return journey. At the same time the men could get their dinner. He decided not to go and meet his wife. It would mean starting almost at once, and not being back at Rojate till dusk. The whole day would be thus wasted ; and he fully realised that with Ascania on the scene he would be able to do very little business. Her talent for wasting other people's time was much more surprising than her

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determination to waste her own. And in such a temper as her present one, the whole day would scarcely be long enough to pacify her.

He decided, therefore, to do as much as he could before her arrival, and immediately set to work with the heads of the different departments. The estate was a large one; and its management, if any real attempt were made to manage at all, involved real labour and attention. Half an hour after the departure of the carriage for Valmontone came a third telegram from Ascania:

“Send Gianpaolo and Marasca to meet me at Valmontone.”

Of course it was too late. And the Prince was glad that it happened so. The drive to and from Valmontone was long, and the child might be knocked up by it after his journey yesterday. And his father wanted him to get as much as possible of the more bracing air of the actual mountains up here at Rojate.

Ercole di San Vito had remarked only an hour before how much better Gianpaolo looked already.

“The last time I saw him at Palazzo Crivelli—only a week ago—I noticed how pale and *stanco* he looked. He seems as bright as a hawk to-day.”

At luncheon Prince Crivelli told Don Ercole that the Princess was coming, and both young men expressed their astonishment. Gianpaolo was having dinner at their luncheon. Presently the Prince added that his wife had sent a further telegram demanding that Gianpaolo and Marasca should be sent to meet her at Valmontone, but that it had not arrived till after the carriage was gone.

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“Is Marasca that very handsome nurse?” inquired Ercole.

Luigi looked annoyed as he answered. A moment later Gianpaolo exclaimed—

“She wanted to take us back to Rome. How glad I am you did not get the telegram in time!”

Both young men felt an instant conviction that the child’s shrewd guess was correct. And Luigi felt his face flush hotly with anger.

A train from Naples stops at Valmontone at two o’clock. Ascania with her captives could return to Rome by it in time for her own tea; and she would only have to wait half an hour at Valmontone, and send back the carriage to Rojate with a message.

Ascania loved plots; and a plot that should turn the tables on her husband—leave him alone at Rojate (she, of course, did not know that Ercole di San Vito was there) without Gianpaolo and without Marasca—had suddenly struck her in all its brilliant fascination. It had not occurred to her till sometime after her first furious resolution to go and beard Luigi, and at the same time flee from infection.

She now resolved not to be bothered by going to Rojate at all, if Gianpaolo and Marasca were sent to meet her at Valmontone. She would simply deport them both, and take up her quarters with her mother at the Palazetto Castagna, till it was certain that her maid’s illness was nothing infectious.

Much of this plan Luigi could imagine, once the idea had been suggested to him. Of his wife’s jealousy of Marasca he had no suspicion: it was quite a new thing, and he had heard nothing of it.

The design to kidnap Gianpaolo and drag him back to Rome made Luigi angrier with his wife than almost anything she had ever done.

I cannot pretend he would be less angry when he

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came to know that she also suspected him, or pretended to suspect him, of making love to one of his own servants.

Some accusations fill us with disgust of the coarseness and vulgarity which alone can prompt them, and Luigi was presently bitterly ashamed, utterly sickened, at the notion that his wife, *his wife*, could stoop to such a rummaging in the kennel as to raking up suspicions of himself—himself, Luigi Crivelli, Prince of Rojate—and a nurse-girl.

Ercole di San Vito had sharp eyes and a glib facility for “putting two and two together,” and he watched his host with keen avidity. He was an idle, talkative, by no means high-minded, young loafer of the Roman clubs.

He guessed more than Luigi had, and was certain that Ascania’s jealousy of Marasca had much to do with her anger and her unprecedented flight from Rome in the midst of the season. Whether her suspicions were ill-founded he really did not care. He merely decided to consider the handsome Marasca with more attentive interest next time he saw her.

CHAPTER XII.

ASCANIA'S idea of asking that Gianpaolo and his nurse should be sent to meet her at Valmontone, and that they should all three return to Rome, instead of Rojate, had been an afterthought, a trifle belated, hence its miscarriage. But until she herself arrived at Valmontone she did not know it had miscarried. In the train she had been busily enjoying it in anticipation.

Then she arrived at Valmontone, and found it could not be carried out. Her anger on discovering this she made less effort even than usual to restrain or disguise. It was displayed passionately before the coachman, the stationmaster, the footmen and the *carabinieri*. Perhaps the *capo-stazione*, who was from Caserta, in the " regno," rather admired her for it. Thus he himself was used to conduct himself when displeased with a ticket collector. But the *carabinieri* were not Neapolitans. One was a Tuscan, the other two from Lombardy and the servants were all Romans, or from the Roman state. None of these were edified by the lunatic scolding of the Princess.

Giazza looked on with extreme enjoyment, but despised her termagant lady all the same.

" Is the Princess returning to Rome ? " she inquired presently.

For her own sake Ascania would have loved to do so. But to do so would be to spare Luigi ; and in her present state she would rather lose some pleasures of her own than miss spoiling his.

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The long drive was far from soothing the passionate Princess. She had always been indifferent to scenery, and honestly disliked the country. She would have much preferred stopping all the year round in town had fashion and climate allowed. Convention and an impossible temperature alone drove her from Rome between the end of June and the beginning of October. As it was, she always insisted on returning thither nearly a month earlier than half the world.

To catch the midday train she had been obliged to lunch at eleven instead of half-past twelve. And Ascania was a lady who thoroughly enjoyed her meals, and liked to enjoy them without disturbance or irregularity.

She rather liked her own maid, who was now ill, and did not care at all for Giazza, whom she only supported in a partisan way as coming from her own home in Sicily. She wished Giazza had taken the fever instead.

As the carriage went slowly up the long hill to Olevano, a young man dressed like a gamekeeper passed them.

"Who is that?" demanded Ascania as he saluted.

She always expected to be told everyone's name.

"That is Carluccio, brother of Marasca," replied Giazza. "A *briccone*!" she added in a low voice.

"He *looks* a scoundrel!" declared the Princess, speaking fully loud enough for the young man to hear.

As to that tastes might differ. There was nothing about the young man's extremely handsome face suggestive of a scoundrel. Nevertheless, there was a fire in his beautiful angry eyes that might blaze into very dangerous conflagration.

He had heard the ugly word "*briccone*" applied

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to himself by the Princess, and he made up his mind he had been intended to hear.

Poor Ascania ! Utterly foolish, beyond all sufferance, blind and deaf and mad, she thrusts forward to destruction, as if nothing short of it could soothe her irritated fancy.

Look round upon the lovely hills and bid farewell to them ; turn westward to yonder setting sun, and mark well the last thou shalt ever see ; watch the black wings of night unfold, soon to wrap their never-loosening pall about thyself . . . treasure the last pale relics of the day, for never another day shalt thou have, and to-morrow thou shalt be as little concerned with this trivial fragment we call time as any other whom yesterday's breaking wave flung out upon the dim shore of eternity.

CHAPTER XIII.

ERCOLE DI SAN VITO was not a sensitive person, nor morbidly tactful ; but he honestly wished himself a hundred miles from the Castello of Rojate within half an hour of Ascania's arrival there. Before bedtime he was resolved that he would take the earliest possible opportunity of departing on the morrow. The Princess had come to make herself disagreeable, and had no objection that he should perceive it. Everyone in the castle who came across her did perceive it. He knew her rather well, and with the best intentions in the world, out of sheer friendliness to Luigi, tried to flirt her into good humour. But though he was not a bad hand at the process, and had often known it succeed with her before, it did not at all succeed now. It takes two to flirt, and to-night Ascania would not take a hand.

Ercole also knew Luigi well, and he remembered ever after that on this occasion Crivelli was quite unlike himself. He made scarcely any apparent effort to ignore his wife's eccentricities, hardly any apparent endeavour to salve the wounds of her temper. San Vito began to suspect that the tepid-seeming Englishman had an Italian temper himself, and Ercole's respect for him rose immediately.

Both young men were in the smoking-room when the noise of Ascania's carriage rumbling over the drawbridge announced her arrival. They flung aside their books and went down to the great hall—originally a *stanza di guardia*—to meet her.

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The Prince of Rojate had always treated his wife with almost ceremonious courtesy, and he now went quickly forward to open the door of her carriage himself. Her brothers would have thought it a degradation to do this.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have been hugged before everybody.

"You beast!" she said, leaning out of the carriage. "Why did you not come to meet me?"

"My dear Ascania! You know very well I came here to do certain business. If spending the day with you would have done it as well, I should have stayed in Rome. As it is, I have been hard at work all day."

"That is true," put in the well-meaning Ercole. "I have scarcely seen him——"

"I dare say you have not!" interrupted Ascania, who was now standing with a passionate face, and tearing off a fur cloak as if it were her resolve to rend her clothes like an indignant Pharisee.

"Where is Gianpaolo?" she then demanded. "Why did you not do as I *ordered*, and send him and Marasca to meet me at Valmontone? Why did not you? Why——"

"Your telegram asking me to send them did not arrive till long after the carriage had started," replied her husband.

Ascania simply shrieked.

"*That* is a lie!" she yelled. "I sent it at eight o'clock . . ."

Ercole literally jumped. Never in his life had he heard a woman call her husband a liar; and here was a Roman princess screaming out accusations of lying against the head of one of the proudest princely houses in Rome, with half a dozen of his own servants to hear.

He glanced involuntarily at Luigi, and saw on his

face for the first time that expression that he afterwards remembered so well.

"On your telegram," said the Prince, "it said it had been handed in at ten o'clock. If you wrote it at eight there must have been a delay in sending it."

He spoke in a very clear voice, and not at all hurriedly. His intonation betrayed no heat, but a most intense coldness.

Ercole knew that Luigi had been a very devoted lover, a very much attached husband.

"He will never care for her again," he told himself. "Dio Mio! I should not like to see anyone despise me as Luigi's eyes despise her."

His gentleman's instinct had been to get away; but how? Ascania had not even returned his greeting yet. He was standing literally with his hand out when her first explosion made it drop as if it had been shot.

How could he get away without his very retreat being a declaration of disapproval? He had hoped to be able to ignore, to affect to notice nothing.

The servants were even more miserable. They felt it was a treason to overhear.

"I must say you might say 'How do you do?' Ascania," observed Ercole, with a rather forlorn attempt to take his hostess's blind passion lightly.

"Ercole!" she retorted, "if you don't care to hear me tell my husband what I think of him, you had better go where you *can't* hear, for I shall certainly not hold my tongue because *you* are here."

All this time Luigi had been held to the spot by the fact that he had been trying to help his termagant Princess out of her wraps—another courteous service that her brothers would have left to the footmen.

During tea Ascania's temper was more and more freely indulged, until at last poor young San Vito

really could not stand it any longer, and fled undisguisedly.

She had been so outrageous already that it was, thought Luigi, impossible for her now to become worse. But he was mistaken.

"As if I did not know," she cried, leaping from her chair as if about to leap on him, "as if I did not know what brings you here, you and Gianpaolo . . ."

He looked at her, not in greater, but in a new and deeper astonishment.

"What *brings* me here!" he repeated. "I told you what brought me here, and what brought Gianpaolo."

"And you thought I believed! You thought me such a holy fool!" (To do him justice, Luigi did not look as if he, at all events, thought her holy.) "Do you think I do not know about you and Marasca!" she yelled.

Luigi did not jump as Ercole most certainly would have done had he still been in the room. But someone else did, someone of whose near presence neither Ascania nor her husband knew.

As for him, he stood as still as ever. And his deep, cold scorn hardly seemed intensified. He was not given to exclamations, and he made none now.

"Are you going on?" he asked. "For both our sakes I hope not. Some things can never be unsaid . . ."

"I want nothing to unsay. I tell you I knew all along what made you bring Marasca away here to Rojate—and Gianpaolo as your excuse."

"Listen!" he interrupted, and to interrupt was another thing to which he was most unused. "Listen, Ascania! Finish saying what you have begun, and

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I tell you plainly that no power on earth will induce me to go on living with you."

That at all events she might not say it then—then in her mad, uncalculating fury and passion—he left the room, so abruptly, so unexpectedly, that in a moment she found herself alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING dinner Ercole still assured himself that the gold of the Indies would not keep him at Rojate an hour next morning.

Luigi was a little more silent than usual, but not less courteous. Nevertheless, San Vito noted that change in him which has been mentioned.

"If she had one grain of reason left she would be *afraid* of him," he told himself.

In his heart he had sometimes accused Crivelli of being afraid of his termagant wife. Ercole was not the only Roman who secretly condemned him as *henpecked*. He suddenly realised how much they had been mistaken.

"She is mad!" he decided, and tried to remember if there had been any talk of madness about these San Stefanos. But as Sicilians they were not really well known in Rome; and Sicilian saints and Roman madness might be much the same.

Ascania had a certain beauty, and sometimes looked brilliantly handsome; but to-night he thought her simply ugly.

She needed adornment, and was generally much concerned about dress, and, if anything, over-given to splendour. Ercole and Luigi were both in evening dress. Ascania still wore the gown in which she had travelled, and it was neither smart nor pretty. Her hair had certainly not been attended to since her arrival, and her face had apparently not been washed: it bore the evident trace of abundant

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tears, for Ascania seldom flew into a passion without copious weeping.

Ercole did not scruple to tell himself that the Princess looked dirty. Her skin had sometimes a muddy quality that made any neglect of these matters the more unfortunate.

"What a fool she is!" he thought. "It takes a lot of beauty to carry off ill-temper. Luigi never could have cared for her except for her good looks and cheeriness. One sees how much the latter is worth, and anyone can see where the beauty will have gone in a year or two."

Before dinner was over the fated woman had flatly insulted her husband half a dozen times, as little heedful of the presence of servants as of that of Ercole.

That she left them after dinner both young men felt to be "an uncovenanted mercy," and they sat longer than they would otherwise have done. Neither, of course, made the smallest allusion to her, but Ercole said he should return to Rome on the morrow.

"Perhaps we may, too," remarked his host. "I've done about all I had to do here: a couple of hours in the morning will finish it. I dare say we shall meet at the ball to-morrow night at the Palazzo Nuovo."

Ascania was not in the room that on occasions like these they used as a drawing-room, the actual reception rooms being enormous, and difficult either to light or to warm. The whole castle was still almost entirely mediæval; at least, nothing much had been done to it for two or three hundred years. The most valuable pictures had been attended to, the very splendid furniture of the State apartments had been restored, tapestries in some instances

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repaired and rehung, and the scagliola flooring renovated and even relaid in places. And all this had been the work of the present Prince. Scarcely anything new had been added.

Ercole, feeling rather a poltroon, took early advantage of his opportunity and went off to bed. Prince Crivelli returned to his papers and business. Nevertheless, his mind was entangled with the thought of his wife.

On an occasion like this he had never known her fail to bring the day to a climax by a final row. After which tears and sometimes a proclamation of peace, or at least of an armistice.

Presently came Gianino, his own valet, an old Roman of the Trastevere.

"Signore Principe," he said, "I am ill. I never am ill, but now I am ill. I cannot stand, and I am come to ask, Excellency, if Sisto can attend to the Signor Principe for this one night."

The young Prince looked up and gave the requested permission very kindly. Gianino was a very old servant, having served the Casa Crivelli nearly fifty years. He looked wretchedly ill, and his master bade him make haste to bed.

Between the servants of great Italian families and their masters there is usually more respect and less distance than is the case between an English nobleman and his household.

Luigi liked his ancient valet, and was sorry he should be out of sorts: he was a strong old man, and, as he had just said, was never ill.

Sisto, who was to take his place, was not a Roman, but a Sicilian from San Stefano, another importation of the Principessa's.

Presently a hospitable idea came into Luigi's head to go and see if Ercole di San Vito had all he

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wanted. He had felt peculiarly absent-minded when his guest left him, and had perhaps neglected to inquire as to anything further he might like. Prince Crivelli was a most scrupulously attentive host.

Ercole seemed glad to see him. He was smoking, and had not yet undressed. The two young men stood by the huge window together and looked out on the exquisite night. The moon was full, and swung in the chill heavens like a gold and silver lamp. From their feet the mountain fell, precipice after precipice, slope after slope, down to the valley miles below. In the valley lay a white ocean of what looked like wool—cold, impenetrable, deathly mist.

Ercole's was a slight, superficial nature, but he was not a bad child ; and he was to-night oppressed by the burden of sympathy. To say anything was out of the question, and he did not dream of attempting to say anything. But he stood by Luigi's side, and longed to make him feel how sorry he was. And Luigi did feel it.

"Ascania will be better to-morrow," he said quietly : "rushing off here has tired and upset her."

They shook hands and said good night. Ercole gave the tiniest little squeeze as he held his friend's hand in his own. Then he stood at his own door and watched the Prince go quickly—he always walked with a light, swift step—down the stone corridor, like a tunnel, as all the corridors at Rojate were. At the corner Luigi turned and nodded a final good night and disappeared. Ercole never saw him again.

He turned back into his own room and began to undress, thinking all the time of Luigi, whom he

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found he liked much better than he had ever supposed. Then he thought of Ascania, whom, on the other hand, he realised that he had never cared for. He recalled her monstrous behaviour since her arrival to-night, and abruptly found himself repeating the old, ever-quoted tag :—

“*Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.*”

“Those whom the gods would slay they first deprive of sense.”

That he must meet Ascania again in the morning before he left he knew ; but he made up his mind to see as little as possible of her in the future. Such wild cats, he told himself, are dangerous.

In reality he would never see her : would see only such torn remnant of her as her murderer would leave.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Luigi got back to the smoking-room, he found his wife there. She had opened the big window and was leaning out. Like many southerners, she was much more susceptible to heat than to cold.

The candles on the table werè guttering in the draught.

Luigi took a book and sat down, though the flickering of the light made it difficult to read. The eyes of the only picture in the room seemed to watch him, and their expression was sad, devoted, outraged, horror-stricken, tender.

Almost the whole room had been by his own arrangement hung with tapestry, literally "hung." That is, the tapestries were not stretched, but depended loosely, falling in some places into full folds.

These tapestries he had discovered rolled up in a dusty gallery that had long done service as a lumber-room. There he had found much beautiful old furniture only needing renovation and repair.

The tapestries had not yet been restored, having been hung here after merely beating and cleansing. They were frail, and in places ragged. Much faded, one could still make out the subjects, taken from the life of Urban III., the Crivelli Pope.

Behind them were the six-feet-thick walls of stone. On the floor of scagliola lay an old but very thick Oriental carpet. Over the fireplace hung the only picture, a portrait of the same Donna Giulia dei

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Crivelli whom we have seen before in the Palazzo Crivelli in Rome.

She had been an only daughter of most devoted parents, and the most beautiful of the Crivelli. It was not surprising that her portrait had been painted more than once. As a matter of fact, both these had been the work of the same great artist, and nearly at the same time. One had been painted for her parents, that in the Roman palace. This had been for her husband, and after the tragedy of his death and her own had been sent back by his family, the Papagalli.

Except for one very huge and heavy table, a smaller one for writing, some equally massive chairs, and a couple of tall dark screens, there was little furniture in the room.

Presently Ascania turned and looked at her husband. It always irritated her to see him read.

"I should think," she said, the passion still bubbling in her throat as at the lips of a caldron, "I should think instead of coolly reading that nonsense—whatever it is——"

"It is the nonsense of a certain Italian called Dante," he informed her parenthetically.

Sometimes this would have pleased her—her husband hoped, against hope, that it might now. Ascania never read poetry herself, or saw any object in it. But she was very chauvinist: and if there were to be poets, it was a good thing that an Italian should be recognised as the greatest.

To-night she merely ignored all this.

"I should think," she repeated hotly, "that instead of reading you would take the first opportunity of our being alone to apologise."

He looked up for a moment only. From the unusual

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expression of his face the wretched woman might have taken warning.

"Should you really!" he observed, immediately dropping his eyes upon the book again.

He did not, as she had intended, ask "for what." So she had to tell him without his asking, which was irritating.

"A gentleman begs his wife's pardon when he has misbehaved himself to her," she spurted out.

Ascania was often delivered of her diatribes like a leaky syphon.

To this general principle Luigi offered no objection, and subscribed no adhesion.

"Do you hear, Luigi?"

Again he looked up, and looked also into her face.

"Of course I hear. Look here, Ascania, this has now lasted seven or eight hours. Let us consider the episode closed. Even you, I should think, would appreciate by now the charm of variety."

He stood up, and his expression was good-natured, pacific, all for conciliation. Did she for one moment hesitate? He watched, behind his smile, to see. That she did not herself believe in the least her monstrous accusation as to her husband's infidelities was at once its best feature and its worst. But the Angel of Destruction stood behind her, and his fatal shadow fell black between her and common reason, common sense.

No doubt before going to sleep she and her husband would have kissed again with tears. She loved those kisses and thoroughly enjoyed those tears. Anger and embraces are much akin, phases of the same sensual craving. Meanwhile, she would have her row, whereof the torrents of weeping, the final kissing should be the climax.

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She reiterated all her grievances : that Gianpaolo had been brought to Rojate ; that he had not been sent down to Valmontone to meet her ; that Luigi had come to Rojate himself ; that she, Ascania, had lost a dinner-party and a reception by coming. (In this she was not strictly accurate, for the dinner-party was at her own house, and she had merely put off the guests at the last moment. The reception was a true bill, but it was at a dull house, and she had never had much intention of going.)

With a patience that might have turned Job green with envy, Luigi proved again and again the baselessness of these accusations as matters for reviling of himself.

Then, like a cracker that seems to have sizzled out, did she burst forth again in a final explosion about Marasca.

And now the cold, white anger of her husband's face might have warned anyone, even any maniac, but her it did not warn.

She stood close to the table where the huge beeswax candles flickered and guttered as the cold night breathed in on them, then burned straight again as the sighing gust died down.

Sometimes, as these puffs of wind came, the tapestries upon the wall rustled like leaves, fell silent, and stirred again like the sound of a woman's dress.

But Ascania, never perceptive, though sharply watchful often and inquisitive, noted none of these things. In heaven above, in earth beneath, in that last hour of her life she noted nothing, heeded nothing, but her own passionate, unreal, counterfeited grievance. Once it seemed to Luigi as if the whole night sighed. And he sighed too—the inaudible, stifled sigh of immense patience pushed past its limit.

Above Ascania, on the wall, stood the other,

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pictured lady. But now her gaze was not for him, but all for Ascania. Her she watched with a scrutiny that seemed as full of pity as of scorn. Her finger still seemed as if about to command silence, still about to be laid upon her lip. She enjoined silence, and she promised it.

I have seen that picture a hundred times, and I know there is only one other like it in the world. Only one other portrait ever painted thus embodies a secret never to be revealed, horror and pity, exquisite beauty and poignant misery, unfathomable pathos, and a scorn so infinite that at first it looks no more than sorrow.

On the table were two objects that had belonged to Sinibaldo dei Crivelli, only son of that first Sinibaldo, Prince of Rojate, whom Luigi had himself succeeded. Had this young Sinibaldo lived he would have been Prince of Rojate now. But he had been killed in Eritrea, and his widowed mother was that "Zia" whom Luigi had wanted to invite to luncheon.

The objects on the table that had been his were a whip and a knife: both rather peculiar, as was natural, seeing that Don Sinibaldo had brought them from Abyssinia. The whip looked like agate, yellow and almost transparent, about as thick as a finger at its thickest part, and wonderfully flexible. The knife, or dagger, was rather roughly made, horribly sharp on both edges, and protected by a handsome sheath. Neither of these articles were generally on the table, but on a high shelf over the writing-table. Ercole di San Vito had taken them down and neglected to replace them.

Ascania was always given to fidgeting with things: she picked up the dagger and half pulled it out of its sheath. She seemed so inattentive and so careless

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that Luigi took it out of her hand. Then she picked up the whip.

"Ascania," her husband said, in a voice so low and yet so clear that it sounded remote and yet within himself, "for once *you* must listen to *me*. To be accused—that I, Luigi dei Crivelli, should be accused of making love to a servant, and that servant one of our own people from Rojate here, your servant and mine, the attendant of our child, your child and mine, that of this you should accuse me in your own mind, in most unworded suspicion, would fill me if I could have divined such a thing with horror and disgust. Horror of *you*! disgust of *you*! What sort of mind must yours be? What sort of person must you be to be capable of such a sort of suspicion of your husband? What sort of a princess thinks her husband likely to prefer a nursegirl to herself? What sort of a lady? But this accusation, monstrous and grotesque as it is, you have not harboured silently, but proclaimed upstairs and down, before half our servants here, before Ercole di San Vito; and yet you do not believe one word of it. Disgusting as your shrieking the accusation abroad is, it would be fifty times more disgusting if you did in truth believe it. I do you the justice to feel certain that you don't. But, Ascania——"

"Don't I!" she burst forth, "don't I! I do! And by heaven I swear I will not have the dirty leavings of a nurse!"

The whip was in her hand: his face, pale and bitterly scornful, a yard away. Like a flash of lightning, the long, slim, very flexible thong of rhinoceros-hide rose and as swiftly fell, and with a stinging cut it had struck across his lips and across his cheek.

CHAPTER XVI.

ERCOLE DI SAN VITO did not dance at the Palazzo Nuovo on the night of the twenty-fifth of February. Neither did he leave Rojate so soon as he had intended, though more than ever he would have been glad to leave it, and never see the dreadful place again.

Early in the morning he was roused by his own servant. The man's face was pallid with horror.

"Eccellenza!" he stammered, with scarcely an apology for his rough awakening of his master, "Eccellenza, it is fearful! The Princess has been murdered! The Prince and Don Gianpaolo are gone—nowhere to be found . . ."

He burst into tears, he beat his breast, and walked round and round crying—

"It is horrible! In all the world there was nothing so horrible ever! Eccellenza, it is horrible, horrible! The Prince gone, Don Gianpaolo gone, the Princess murdered! They found her . . ."

Then he poured forth in a dreadful torrent of words a description of how the maids whose business it was to attend to the smoking-room had gone thither to begin their work, and of what they had seen; of how almost at the same moment the nurses had come running out to say Don Gianpaolo was nowhere to be found . . .

It was all too true. Ercole di San Vito dragged on his clothes, and through the many hollow passages, like cold tunnels in the chill February morning,

hurried to the horrible place. It was full of servants, some weeping, some whispering, some loudly exclaiming, some in stony silence, others wailing and wringing their hands.

There lay Ascania rolled in torn tapestries, themselves darkened with her blood, as was the heavy carpet, as were the other rent and tattered hangings on the walls. In the last death-wound the Abyssinian knife still stuck deep and fast, but there had been many other previous wounds.

Chairs had been overturned, the cloth was dragged from the table, the candlesticks lay bent upon the ground.

Here and there, it was clearly to be seen, the wretched lady had clutched the loose folds of tapestry, had tried even to pull herself up out of reach by means of them. In places they were torn down, and the bare walls showed behind. In others they hung in flimsy tatters. From the chimney the pictured lady looked down and watched, with her hand advanced to her lips, keeping silence and enjoining it.

Already Ercole noticed that scarcely any of the servants, even the most talkative, alluded to the quarrel the dead Princess had fastened on her husband from the first moment of her coming yesterday.

Giazza and Sisto, the two Sicilians, tried to speak of it, and Marasca and her brother the keeper, who was also there, looked up with startled eyes to listen to what they should say. But Gianino, who had dragged himself from his bed, oblivious and indifferent to all sickness of his own now, silenced them fiercely. And the other servants, all Romans or of Rojate, murmured approval.

Then Giazza and Sisto shut their mouths, but with a sullen anger, and Ercole knew that hereafter they would speak. Everyone in the castle would be

examined, and he knew what they would say. Nay, he himself must be examined, and on oath, and what he must himself say he also knew miserably.

There were many people to summon. The legal authorities local and Roman, the Cardinal dei Crivelli, and Ascania's mother. By telegram he informed the Cardinal, charging him with the task as regarded the old Duchess of San Stefano and the Roman authorities of justice. Mounted messengers were sent to Olevano and Valmontone.

Except that Prince Crivelli had disappeared, no one all day long brought any word of him. That he should have taken Gianpaolo with him Ercole found at once most astounding and most natural. He knew that Luigi adored his child. Flying thus, and knowing as he must know that such flight must be from Italy and for ever, it was pitifully natural that he should carry away his son into his own hopeless exile. And yet how senseless ! In such a flight a child could not fail to be the weightiest encumbrance, must inevitably make identification easier, capture more probable.

That no news came from anywhere in the mountains of the fleeing Prince, either then or as the days went by, did not at all surprise Ercole, or anyone else at Rojate. No peasants of the mountains would inform of the Prince if they had seen him, or ever be driven to admit that they had seen him. Perhaps he had taken refuge with the brigands ; for there is always talk of brigands in those ranges of the Sabina, true talk often, oftener imaginary or exaggerated.

Weeks afterwards it was declared that the Prince and his son had been seen, seen on board a steamer. But some said it was at Naples, others were sure it was at Palermo, others again knew it was at Messina or Catania ; it was on a vessel of the Navigazione Generale Italiana, it was on a Messageries boat for

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Marseilles, it was on a Norddeutscher Lloyd ; but all were convinced that by now the Prince must be safe in America.

Meanwhile, the old Cardinal, much broken and visibly aged, had arrived long ago at Rojate, and the Duchess of San Stefano had utterly refused to come. She instantly took to her bed when it was suggested, and remained there till all such suggestion had ceased.

The Cardinal was the head of the Casa Crivelli now, and its only male member, at all events in Italy. When he should die the haughty race of mountain princes founded by Urban III. would be extinct, or so he himself believed.

He was doubly a prince now—prince of the church and Prince, by default, of Rojate.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR a long time Rome had much to say. That Ascania had brought her fate on herself many allowed; for Ercole di San Vito's account of her behaviour from the moment she arrived at Rojate was well known, and the account also given by the servants in their examination.

And previous misbehaviours of this sort on the wretched woman's part got known mysteriously, possibly exaggerated. Her own flirtations were raked up and lost nothing in re-telling.

But, after all, she had been murdered, and whatever her provocations had been, she had paid for them horribly.

To trace Luigi had been quite impossible. Some said not nearly enough pains had been taken to trace him.

His mother and sisters came no more to Rome, remaining thenceforth entirely in Scotland. The Palazzo Crivelli was shut up, for the Cardinal continued to occupy his apartments in the Via Giulia. And the Crivelli began, not to be forgotten, but to fall back into the mystery and romance of the past.

Meanwhile Cardinal Crivelli grew older and more broken, more frail and ghostlike, till at last people called him, in fact, the "Ghost of the Crivelli."

Ercole di San Vito was kind to the old man, and often went to see him. Noticing how his expenses had been in nowise increased, Ercole decided that the

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Cardinal knew his nephew's whereabouts, and by some means supplied him well with money.

But of the tragedy whose shadow had fallen so near them both they never spoke to one another.

At last, however, it was destined to be discussed between them.

Nearly seven years after the murder of Ascania and the flight of her husband, Ercole received a note from the Cardinal early one morning begging him to come and see him. He went, and found the old man in a strange, tense excitement, not at all of the talkative kind. He was evidently preparing for a journey.

"I am going to Rojate," he said, "and—if it is possible, if it is not too inconvenient—I am going to ask you to come with me."

There was really nothing to prevent Ercole. It was October, and nobody was in Rome; he had no engagements, and if it had been to any other place he would have been glad enough to get away for a day or so into the mountains. But to Rojate he had an aversion that had scarcely weakened at all since that horrible February morning seven years ago.

Nevertheless, he presently consented, and the Cardinal informed him they were going to drive.

This did not surprise Ercole much. His Eminence was the most old-fashioned person in Rome, and the last of the cardinals to keep up old customs. He disliked the railway, and scarcely ever used it; indeed, his journeys from Rome were nearly all such as might just as easily be performed in his own carriage. And Cardinal dei Crivelli had splendid horses, another old Roman habit.

Ercole did not mind driving either. He was not afraid of brigands; and the open solitudes of the Campagna, and afterwards the ever-mounting but

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excellent road into the heart of the Sabines (built by Pius IX.), would make a refreshing change after the city.

"I drive," said the Cardinal as they passed out of Rome by the Porta San Sebastiano, "I drive because I'm an old, pig-headed man who likes to ignore time's changes, and behave, as far as may be, as if things remained still as they were when I was your age."

"For my part," said Ercole, "I think it is a much pleasanter way of travelling, and in this instance pretty nearly as quick. Allowing an hour or so for luncheon at Albano, it will take us with your horses five hours and a half. If we went by train, there would be from your palace to Valmontone Station two hours, and from Valmontone to Rojate at least three more."

It was one of those exquisite autumn mornings that are lovelier, I think, near Rome than anywhere else. The air was fresh and cool, the sun bright, and a smell that belongs to October filled one with a sense that was like elation. The horses needed no urging, and cheery was the ring of their feet on the ancient paved way that for two-and-twenty centuries has seen so endless a going and returning to and from the world's great capital.

On either side lay illustrious tombs, around them garden-like enclosures, behind these patches of vineyard, and then the empty, utterly silent Campagna.

They did not talk much : Ercole had an idea that all old people were rather deaf, and thought it necessary to raise his voice, which, of course, was a little fatiguing. As a matter of fact, the Cardinal's hearing was excellent, and though he was too courteous to beg his companion not to shout, it was slightly tiresome to him.

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Beyond the tomb of Cæcilia Mella the road becomes more solitary: the walls have ceased, and the ineffable melancholy of the Campagna is all around.

But Ercole for many years had never seen his old friend look so little sad. A slight flush lighted up his usually pale cheeks, and a sparkle that was hopeful, if not glad, animated his large black eyes.

"Ercole," he said, turning quite abruptly to his young companion, "I am going to ask you something . . ."

And instantly San Vito knew what about, though the subject had long been avoided between them.

"Ercole," asked the old man, sinking his voice, but speaking with eager and clear rapidity, "you know what my sorrow is! Not that I am the last—if I really am the last—of our race, but that it should have ended in the crime of its head."

He paused a moment, and looked far away across the pale green ocean of the Campagna to where the mountains, like a rocky coast, rose from it in a vast curve. Then, turning again, he laid his thin, delicately beautiful old hand on the young man's arm.

"Ercole! Do *you* believe Luigi killed his wife!"

It was, somehow, more like an exclamation than a question, and the Cardinal scarcely seemed to expect an answer. And if he had, what could San Vito have replied? That after reiterated provocation the Prince of Rojate had slain his wife no one had ever doubted.

Of that last scene—of Ascania's final insults, of the blow with the whip—much had been overheard, as during the protracted and reiterated examinations had been ascertained.

"If," the Cardinal went on, "it were true, as people think, that Luigi were alive now, he and Gianpaolo, in America; if it were the case that they

were living there on money sent by me, then it would be true also that Luigi killed his wife, killed her and fled from Italy with his child."

Again the old man paused, and looked away over the melancholy emptiness of that weird landscape. Ercole was more than interested: he had always believed that Luigi and Gianpaolo did live somewhere, out of Europe probably, on money regularly remitted by the Cardinal.

"I myself," the latter continued, "have always hoped that he was dead. I never heard one word, one hint of his existence from the moment of his disappearance; and if he and Gianpaolo were alive, I know he would have let me know, and have let his mother know. Neither of us have ever received one word, one line"

"Every day all these seven years I have said Mass for them both—Luigi and Ascania, I mean. And this morning I said it. But afterwards something unusual happened. It was during my thanksgiving, when the Mass was over, and I am certain I was not asleep. I had just finished the *Anima Christi*, when something made me turn my head—I do not think it was any sound—and I looked towards the door. My *prie-Dieu*, you know, is placed angle-wise, facing towards the middle of the altar. Well, just inside the door of the chapel, a little behind me, stood Luigi, beside him stood Ascania, and between them, each of them holding him by a hand, was Gianpaolo. The child was looking up in their faces with a happy, satisfied expression. They were looking at me. When our eyes met they both smiled. Luigi looked older, so did Ascania, so did the child—older, but absolutely unchanged. Nay, what am I saying! Features were unaltered, figure, gesture; but both were *elevated*, purified—something earthly had fallen

from them, something heavenly had grown into them."

The old man spoke with a singular force and earnestness, but without excitement or delusion. Ercole listened almost breathless, but from the very first convinced.

"Presently they knelt—all three ; and the words of the *Te Deum* rose to my own lips like a divine infection from theirs, and I knew they were joining in thanksgiving. And when they rose, with a gesture that said farewell, I could read in it also this : '*No more Masses need you say for us : we are together henceforth, our quarrel healed, our pain ended, our faults blotted out.*' Presently they smiled at me, made their reverence, and passed out. I knelt on and thanked God, then myself went out. Outside the door old Onopio, my *cameriere*, was waiting with my letters. 'Did you see anyone come out ?' I asked him. 'No one came out,' he answered quite quietly, 'but I saw them go in !' 'Whom did you see ?' I asked him, and he answered promptly and without hesitation : 'Their Excellencies the Prince Luigi, the Princess Ascania, and Don Gianpaolo.' 'You saw them go in ?' 'Yes, Eminenza, nearly ten minutes ago.' Then he gave me my letters, bidding me note that one was marked 'Urgent.'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ I AM certain now,” the Cardinal observed, after a thoughtful pause, “ that Luigi and Gianpaolo are both dead, that both are happy, and Ascania happy with them. God is good ! ”

For a little while Ercole was silent. Then he asked—

“ Is this why you are going to Rojate ? ”

“ No. That letter marked ‘ Urgent ’ was from Don Pippo, the old parish priest at Rojate, who nearly died on the day . . . You know when I mean. He had been very ill already, and it was partly to see him that Luigi went out that time to Rojate. But he didn’t die after all. He wrote last night to beg me to come out. He urges that it is a matter closely concerning the honour of the Casa Crivelli, but declares that he will not write it. That is why I have come.”

At the entrance of the village, or “ *paese* ” as they themselves call it, Don Pippo was waiting for them : perhaps he had been waiting some time, but he did not betray the least impatience. He was a very pious old person, and he considered impatience “ imperfect.” He knew they were coming, and that they would drive, for a telegram had been sent.

At the Cardinal’s invitation he got into the carriage, which he asked might be shut now, for it was cold up here in the mountains.

“ There is a man dying here,” he said, “ and it is to see him I sent for your Eminence. You may re-

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member him, for your Eminence had always a good memory. He is called Sisto, a Sicilian, who used to be in the service of the most excellent house ; and he married, about seven years ago, a woman called Marasca, who had been also in the most excellent household—I need not remind you. The woman died in childbirth of her first *bambino* ; and afterwards he married a certain Giazza, also a Sicilian, whom it is impossible that your Eminence should forget. (If you will allow me, we will stop here, for the carriage can hardly pass to the fellow's house.) ” They accordingly got out, and the old priest continued : “ That woman is dead too, dying also in childbirth. Both of the man's wives suffered horribly, and the children of neither were born alive. Of course, they were unbaptised. All this your Eminence will remember presently. The ways of the Omnipotent are inscrutable ; His judgments are terrible. (This way, Eminence ; this way, Excellency.) ”

The cottage stood alone in a small vineyard. A dog like a wolf snarled at them out of his kennel, where he was tied up with a length of dirty rope. A bowl of tomato pulp stood on a trestle outside the door, some large pumpkins were ranged on a flat outhouse roof. There was an acrid smell from the shrivelled and withered vines.

The dying man was propped up in bed. He was incredibly emaciated, but though evidently in fever, quite sensible, and able to speak without any great appearance of effort.

“ It was not, of course,” said Don Pippo, “ in Confession that I learned those things which caused me to write yesterday to you, Eminence. This man told them to me in ordinary confidence, expressly

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that I should send for you. Only to-day would he go to Confession : even now he has not had *Il Santo Viatico*. He wants to tell his story himself."

And he told it.

From the first day he saw Marasca he was, he said, "impassioned" with her : the love of her devoured him like a fire, and the thought of anyone else even speaking to her maddened him. He was all the more jealous because she would neither admit she loved him nor deny it. If he accused her of having another lover she would say neither "yes" nor "no." Sometimes she seemed really to care for him ; at others to be absent-minded, as if thinking of someone else. Meanwhile, Giazza was jealous of *her* ; for Giazza, though she was too proud to show it voluntarily, was herself in love with him, Sisto.

Giazza at last began to speak of their master's being in love with Marasca, and of Marasca being deep in love with the Prince. Soon afterwards came the "flight" of the Prince and Don Gianpaolo to Rojate, with Marasca instead of Giazza to attend the child. Giazza pretended to him that she had begged to be allowed to go, but the Prince had refused, and Marasca had triumphed over her. Next day the Princess followed her husband to Rojate, taking Giazza in place of her own maid, who was sick ; and he, Sisto, had obtained through Giazza permission to go with them.

In the hall, when they arrived at the castle, he had heard the Princess openly accuse her husband of loving Marasca ; and during dinner he had heard the same accusation repeated and enlarged. He felt certain Marasca had been brought to Rojate for the purpose Donna Ascania asserted. After dinner Gianino, the Prince's valet, felt too ill to remain up, and told Sisto he should obtain permission to go to

bed, and that he would ask Don Luigi to let Sisto himself act as valet for that night.

Meanwhile, another thing had happened. Carluccio, brother of Marasca, a very proud man with a dauntless and high temper, had overheard the Princess speak insultingly of himself to Giazza as the carriage came slowly uphill from Valmontone and he walked past it. He came into the servants' hall at the castle blazing with anger against her, but saying nothing of it. In silence he learned from the other servants how the Princess had arrived and had insulted the Prince before half a dozen of them, coupling his sister's name dishonourably with the Prince's.

He generally saw the Prince about game, &c., just after tea in the smoking-room, and had gone up thither by a back staircase, when he overheard the Princess's abuse of her husband there, and with his own ears heard her intolerable insults of his sister.

All this, however, Sisto himself only came to know later. He himself all that evening was boiling with a hotter and hotter fury of jealousy and anger against his master. As it grew late he hung about, waiting for the Prince to come to his own room to undress, in which, owing to Gianino's illness, it was to be his duty to assist him.

Hearing at last a very loud voice in the smoking-room, he had crept near the door of it, which opened from the Prince's dressing-room. Beyond the dressing-room was the Princess's bedroom, and beyond that Don Gianpaolo's night nursery. Neither nurses slept there, but in rooms of their own opening out of the day nursery on the other side of the corridor. All the rooms just mentioned on this side the corridor opened into one another. From the smoking-room a second door led on to the corridor, from which, close to this door, the back staircase

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already mentioned led down. Inside both doors of the smoking-room were tall, heavy and dark screens.

During the whole scene between the Prince and Princess the valet had stood eavesdropper, every word of hers being audible, and nearly all that her husband, in his much lower but very clear voice, had rejoined. The Prince was nearer to him than the Princess, but with his back to the doorway in which Sisto stood. The loose folds of the tapestry fell together over the doorway, which was shadowed and partly hidden by the tall, dark screen.

He could never see the Prince's face or judge of its expression, and the Prince's replies were not what he, a Sicilian, would have expected from a falsely-accused husband. All his animosities were roused against his master: what sympathy he had to spare from himself was for his mistress. She really was his mistress: Don Luigi was only his Princess's husband. She was Sicilian, like himself: he came from her "*paese*," had been born on the old Duke of San Stefano's land, had been in the Duke's household since he was a young boy, and had only lately been transferred to the service of the Casa Crivelli—Romans and foreigners. He had always been the partisan of the Princess. And now her injuries, which he then madly believed, were his own. To revert to the Prince's manner. A Sicilian prince so accused, had he been in truth innocent, would, Sisto felt sure, have answered with as great a fury as his wife's, perhaps have silenced her with force, certainly passionate anger, quite unlike this low, cold immovability.

Then came the blow on the Prince's face, and in a moment he saw the Prince turn and, with his hand to his face, almost stagger to the doorway in which he himself was standing. He also turned and drew

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back, hurrying across the dressing-room, which was also thickly carpeted because of the season and the cold scagliola flooring. There was no light but that of the moon shining through the uncurtained window.

Half-way across the room the Prince's foot caught in a fold of the loose carpet, which he himself had kicked up a moment before in his flight. Don Luigi fell, and instantly Sisto had leapt upon him. He was taller than the Prince, and much heavier. With his hands, and with a towel he had been holding all through the scene between Prince and Princess, he strangled his master. At the moment he had heard the first words of the quarrel between Prince and Princess he had been arranging the towels on the stand by the washing-place.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE Prince had made scarcely a sound, though, of course, he struggled beneath his assailant's weight. But a dreadful noise was taking place behind him in the smoking-room whence Don Luigi had rushed.

All this time the door into the Princess's bedroom had been closed: tapestries overhung it also. No doubt the other door opening from Donna Ascania's room into Don Gianpaolo's must also have been closed.

But just as Sisto knew that his work was done he heard both these doors open, and in the moonlight stood the child, whom some evil chance had awakened, and who, awakening perhaps in fear, had come to seek his parents.

That he saw and understood what Sisto had done was written on his face, ghastly white in the broad silver light of the moon. But the child neither screamed nor fled. He stood shivering and pointing at his dead father's body on the floor. Maddened with fear for himself, the murderer could not spare the child, and he did not.

Then he dragged both bodies to the window, softly opened the casement, and flung them out, leaving the window open, perhaps with some vague idea that when found it might be supposed they had *fallen* out. There was, of course, no blood.

Then a further notion struck him. All these rooms looked to the *side* of the castle, away from the draw-bridge entrance, on which front were the windows of

the *piano-nobile* and the suite of great rooms of State. The moat that had been formed out of the natural ravine was here very narrow and very dark ; at the bottom were loose stones and a rank growth of weeds. There was no entrance to this part of the moat ; at each end it was blocked by a high wall, in which was no door. But from his own bedroom window in the floor below it might be possible to get down. He would go and see.

All this time there was the horrible though not loud, noise in the smoking-room ; but it seemed a sort of outward echo of the horrible turmoil in his own brain. He had no attention to spare for it : he must think of himself, of his own danger.

Safe in his own room, he locked the door, and gently opening the casement, looked out. It was not more than twelve feet from the loose stony bottom of the moat, and down there all was black shadow. Even from here he could not see the bodies, half-buried among the tall weeds : would it not be safest to leave them there untouched ? At first he thought it would : then it occurred to him that in broad daylight they might be very visible.

There was no rope in his room, but he remembered where he had seen some, and he stole forth again and fetched it. This he knotted here and there to climb up by again.

It was not difficult to get down, but he nearly ended his own life there and then. For, concealed by the weeds, and now by the darkness also, was the mouth of an old well. It was disused and partly, perhaps intentionally, filled up with stones. Still, even now it was twelve or fifteen feet deep, and had he fallen into it he might have broken his neck.

("No great loss," thought Don Ercole. The Cardinal was nearly of the same mind, but thought

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of the man's soul, and recognised God's mercy on it.)

Into this well Sisto had not much difficulty in getting the two bodies, and then a few stones, as if they had fallen of themselves from the loose masonry of the well's mouth, dislodged by the impact of the bodies themselves.

He had two reasons for not throwing down more stones : lest doing so might make some noise which might betray him, and in order that, if ever discovered, the bodies might not appear to have been intentionally hidden there.

Once back in his own room, he unlocked his door, undressed and went to bed. To his own great surprise, he discovered that he was unspeakably tired, and, more than that, overpowered by sleep.

He slept until morning : then came the outcry and disturbance of the discovery of Donna Ascania's murder. He seemed wholly to have forgotten her from the moment, in obedience to a half involuntary, wholly unreasoned, entirely animal impulse of uncalculating revenge, he had leapt upon the Prince.

" I do not think," the man said calmly, " that I should have attacked him had he not stumbled. It was as when a man stumbles in a cage of lions : until then they have no idea of attacking him."

Extravagant as this may sound, both the Cardinal and Don Ercole felt an instantaneous conviction that it was true. But the old *parocco* shook his head.

" *Penitenza!*" he admonished. "*Penitenza!* It is not now the moment for vanity."

The dying man had, however, no eyes for him : they were fixed on the two nobles. Priests were useful people when one was drawing near death, especially with a good deal to answer for. But Sisto only cared for the *principatura*. If the old peasant-

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priest failed to understand—well, well, *ja niente!* The nobles would understand. Tst! Yonder Cardinal would understand *anything!*

Marasca and Giazza slept together on the other side of the corridor, at the end farthest from the smoking-room, in a large room with two beds, opposite to that which was used as a night-nursery for Don Gianpaolo. Next to their bedroom, but not opening out of it, was the day-nursery. Immediately opposite the smoking-room was another large room, used as a sort of drawing-room, already alluded to. These three rooms all had windows looking into the courtyard, away from the moat. All the walls were six feet thick, and impervious to sound. Neither Giazza nor Marasca had been awakened or disturbed by any noise.

It was not till they had dressed and gone to fetch Don Gianpaolo from his night-nursery that, missing him, they began to suppose anything uncommon had occurred.

Whether they satisfied others or not in their examination, Sisto was convinced that neither knew anything whatever of the murder of the Princess.

From the first there was scarcely any possibility of suspecting anyone but the Prince himself, and he, by his disappearance with his son, had as it were courted suspicion. That disappearance was, beyond all Sisto's hopes, accepted, not only as accounting for the Princess's murder, but as accounted for itself by that murder. No sort of suspicion had ever attached to Sisto himself, and neither Giazza nor Marasca had ever connected him in the least with Ascania's murder or the Prince's disappearance. Had Giazza possessed any such hold over him, she would never have allowed him to marry her rival.

CHAPTER XX.

ON her death-bed Marasca confessed to him that it was her brother Carluccio, the gamekeeper, who had murdered the Princess. He had himself told her, and made her understand the crime.

On that memorable night, exasperated against Donna Ascania for her insulting remark about himself, overheard as he passed her carriage slowly coming up the hill from Valmontone, further inflamed against her by what he heard reported by the servants, and finally infuriated by the scene he had overheard just after tea between her and Don Luigi, in which his sister had been more openly insulted, he had, late at night, been drawn by a morbid attraction to the place where he had heard all this, and where, if the Princess and her husband were together, he felt certain he should hear more.

Throughout the final scene between the fated pair he had stood listening at the door, just as Sisto had stood listening at the other, both alike hidden by the tall, dark screens and the loose folds of the hanging tapestries that had been specially arranged to meet thus and exclude draughts from the doors.

At every degrading insult of Ascania's the furious man's revengeful passion burned more and more hotly, till at last, in the moment of her horrible blow with the rhinoceros-hide cutting whip upon her husband's face, it had boiled over, like a mess that seethes and bubbles in a pot. That the Prince fled from the place to fly from the sudden temptation to

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kill his wife Carluccio was instantly convinced, and instantly he resolved to do it for him. To do so was, to his wild code of passion and impulse, a feudal service to his lord, as much as an irresistible act of vengeance on his own account. He had seen Prince Crivelli take the native knife out of his wife's hand and lay it back half-sheathed upon the table. He was beside the wretched woman with the dagger in his own hand almost before Don Luigi had disappeared through the curtained tapestries of the opposite door.

Marasca took her own early death as a retribution for this crime.

"You see, Sisto," she had explained to her husband, "Carluccio has become a saint now, and it would be a scandal that a saint should pay the penalties of killing a wicked woman. So I pay."

According to Sisto, she thought it all right. For the credit of her family, she could not refuse to pay.

"You will never catch Carluccio, if you want to," observed Sisto. "He has disappeared, just as safely as the Prince, into the folds of the great Franciscan Order. They will hide him safe enough. Of course, he is not in Italy. Marasca did not herself really know, but she thought in Barbary." Anyway, it was somewhere where Carluccio had a great grace in confounding the heathens (perhaps Sisto meant Mohammedans), to large numbers of whom he was in the habit of preaching. Their religion, it seemed, he was able to turn into a laughing-stock, and the arguments of its prophet into childish gibberish, for all which Carluccio (whatever the saintly *frate's* name might be "in religion") had confident hopes of achieving martyrdom at the hands of these "heathen."

From what they heard, the Cardinal and Don Ercole

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thought it not impossible that he might, unless, indeed, the police regulations of that particular part of Barbary should happen to be preternaturally perfect.

Anyway, they were quite of Sisto's opinion that very little success would attend any effort to drag forth the fiery missionary from the wide folds of the great Franciscan Order, as Sisto had picturesquely put it. Even in death the Sicilian's satisfaction at any balking of mere legal justice was undiminished.

So, Sisto explained, Marasca had died, proud to pay with her own life the debt to heaven which it would have been a scandal should remain due to so great and redoubtable a saint as her brother.

For his part, Sisto was content to pay with the life of their child for that of the child he had killed.

"Of course," he was good enough to declare, "it was always an awful necessity to silence the poor *bambino*; but what other way was there, having seen what he had? At the time I could not argue much, opportunity and time were lacking. But I have argued much to myself since, and it seems to me there was nothing else to do. So I, too, had a price to pay. And my own child, Marasca's baby, died stillborn."

"Unbaptised!" suggested the *parocco*.

"Tst!" said Sisto impatiently, not denying it. "But," he added, "*I* had to pay double, for Giazza's child died too, died stillborn also!"

"Unbaptised!!!" suggested Don Pippo again.

"Tst!" retorted Sisto, again admitting it. "*I* had two children to give for one. I have paid," he declared haughtily.

These "dispositions" were far from satisfying the old priest, though admittedly he thought it impractical to expect any better.

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“And what did you pay for Don Luigi?” he demanded angrily. “What had *you* to give for the Prince of Rojate?”

Sisto seemed almost hurt. Legal justice he detested, but for abstract justice he craved always.

“I! For the Princess’s husband,” he replied, “I gave my wife—two wives. One that I worshipped and one that worshipped me. It was enough. Besides, when I did it I supposed he deserved it. It was only afterwards I knew. Marasca explained. I understood then there had been a mistake. Tst!”

Regrettable as the incident had been, Sisto evidently considered it closed. He was tired of tragedy.

“As soon as Giazza heard that Marasca was dead,” he observed, “she wrote and forgave me for marrying her. It was even better, she declared, for now I could not be hankering after Marasca, as I might have gone on doing had I married Giazza herself in the first place. But now it would be all right. She had nearly two thousand lire in the Banca di Sicilia, and I had this *casetta* that was Marasca’s: she left it me.”

Sisto gave them to understand that his married life with Giazza had been well enough. Then her baby came, was stillborn, and Giazza herself died.

“I paid twice,” he repeated, “twice for the *bambino* and twice for the Prince. But I paid most the first time. Between it all I have paid.”

Next day they heard he was dead. It seemed impossible. No lights of the next world and no shadows of death seemed to have touched him. Such light and shade as they had noted in him were positive, Sicilian, secular, wholly material.

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“ He was,” observed Don Pippo, who brought the news, “ he was not (with respect !) in all essentials a bad man. However,” and the parish priest took snuff copiously and not silently, “ he was a Sicilian. *Brutta bestia !* And last night I gave him the last Sacraments.”

The discoveries in the place indicated by Sisto confirmed all he said. The skeletons were such as might easily be identified with those of the Prince and his child. The medical experts said it was certain that they could not have *fallen* where they lay without dislocation of any joint or fracture of any bone. The Prince’s watch, chain, seals and rings were there to make identification more certain ; and round the child’s neck was a gold chain with certain sacred medals he had always worn.

Any attempt to extract from the folds of the great Franciscan Order the militant friar who had once been Carluccio was from the first recognised to be hopeless. But Sisto’s confession was attested and widely made known. The honour of the Casa Crivelli was given back.

The Cremation of Colonel Calverly.

CHAPTER I.

THE DON.

IT would be an exaggeration to assert that all colonels commanding staff corps regiments in India are teetotallers. But Colonel Hubert Calverly, of the 73rd Bombay Infantry, was undoubtedly an extremely temperate man.

He was eccentric in other ways ; and partly on that account, and partly by reason of the extraordinary chivalry of the man, he was known from Quetta to Ceylon by the nickname of the Don, which was short for Don Quixote.

Now most of Colonel Calverly's eccentricities were, as it would seem to the unlettered mind of the English in England, exceedingly harmless. But to the robust and more tutored intellect of the Resident at Katàra, they could have an exasperating side to them. Colonel Calverly knew thirteen native languages, and the Resident had scruples about knowing even Mahratti properly. Bazaaz-Mahratti was all very well, and perhaps even indispensable, but what on

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earth any English gentleman wanted with the literature of the ancient Mahratta kingdom, the Resident at Katàra could not understand. And Colonel Calverly had the Mahratti language and literature at his finger-ends; and the Sanskrit, Urdu, Pali, Tamul, and eight or nine others as well. It was no study for a gentleman.

Colonel Calverly would not eat beef, because he said it must be insufferable to the Hindu soldiers he commanded to know that he did so; and he would not eat pork, because both Hindu and Mussulman servants thought it disgusting, and for his part he agreed with them. So he lived on mutton and *morghe*, and people said he had "become a Hindu"—which was nonsense. One is a Hindu or one is not, but one can no more become one than one can become an American. Not so much, for persons are permitted to be at large who have done that, but I never heard of anyone taking out letters of naturalisation as a Hindu.

Colonel Calverly knew the Shastas as well as the priests at Towli, and, it was generally whispered, believed them far more sincerely. For the memory of Rama, Prince of Oude, he had a far greater respect than for that of Henry, King of England, and Gautama the Buddha he venerated as a truer Reformer and diviner teacher than Doctor Martin Luther. But what tried the patience of the Resident at Katàra most sorely of all was that Colonel Calverly would address as "rajah sahib" the dethroned descendant of many Mahratta kings who was drinking himself to death in the mud palace in the native city.

Colonel Calverly's other eccentricities were admitted to be harmless. They were chiefly obsolete virtues grotesquely belated in the end of the nineteenth century.

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In appearance the Colonel of the 73rd Bombay Infantry was not striking ; soldier-like and wiry, but not tall, exceedingly dry and brown of skin, lean, and white-haired. He had been young, and now was old ; there was a young clerk in the Treasury (at Katàra, not Whitehall) supposed to resemble him very strongly, but that must have been a mistake, for he had never been married.

Colonel Calverly had been in India for more years than Kinahan, the Assistant-Judge, had been in the world, and for some time had ruled the destinies of the regiment, unofficially known as the Bombay Ducks : not on account of any peculiarity of gait, but simply by reason of the material whereof their overalls were made. The Colonel inhabited the big bungalow next the mess, on the side remote from the church ; and, as the officer commanding the detachment of British troops did not want to take a bungalow, seeing he might be gone to-morrow, and seeing that one of the Don's eccentricities was his limitless good nature, he let that officer share his bungalow.

CHAPTER II.

JIM-JAMS.

HIS real name was the Honourable Ulick FitzUrze de Tracey, and he was the ninth son of the Lord Viscount Ardrahan (Baron Horseleap of Horseleap, in the county of Tyrone, in the peerage of Ireland). But he was universally known as Jim-Jams.

If the Honourable U. FitzU. de Tracey had characteristics as well as Colonel Calverly, they were totally dissimilar. The de Traceys of Horseleap had never gone in for the Blue Ribbon movement ; and on occasions of great public rejoicing, Lord Ardrahan's ninth son saw visions that would have made the fortune of Mr. Morris and his school of designers.

Nothing could have been more Pre-Raphaelite than the dragons and demons beheld by the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey, nothing less hackneyed than the shifting shades of blue and green that predominated in their tails.

So he was called Jim-Jams.

He was a handsome man, and not undervalued by the Anglo-Indian lady. But his popularity was not striking with the Anglo-Indian lady's husband. It was supposed that the Don liked him, or else why did not he get rid of him ? But then the Don found something to like in everybody, even the perspiring deputy policeman at Karli, who impeded the digestion of the other inhabitants of the Deccan. And, after all, was it certain the Don did like him ? For having

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taken him in, it would never occur to the Colonel to cold-shoulder him out. As for the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey, the only person he cared much for was Lord Ardrahan's ninth son ; but, as other people went, he had no objection to the Colonel, and certainly had none to making himself comfortable in his bungalow.

It was not a bad bungalow either, though nothing like so comfortable, of course, as the judge's. The judge's bungalow, next the little Roman Catholic church, although the judge was a bachelor, was by far the best in the station. It was the deathless envy of Mrs. Pillitt, the wife of the Indian Medical Staff doctor. In vain she gave banquets of tinned meats and dazzled the eye with her European goods ; a momentary splendour might be hers, but perennial comfort was the judge's.

CHAPTER III.

MEM-SAHIB.

THOSE who would sorrow as they that have no hope for the death of Colonel Joscelyn of the Pioneers, should remember that had he not died this story could not have been written. Probably that was why his death was arranged. At all events, I cannot think of any other reason. For it was a serious and unlooked-for embarrassment to his daughter. She had only come out from being educated at Surbiton six months before, and in the plans she had made there had been no provision for the decease of her father previous to her own marriage. And she was not yet married. Originally she had intended to marry Captain Forestier, but he had been first dilatory and then faithless: and he was now engaged to that awful girl with the voice. So Miss Joscelyn had turned her attention to the Waler.

Now the Waler's other name was Lieutenant Charles Chichely, and though he was enormous, he was extremely young, and, of course, only a subaltern. The sudden death of Colonel Joscelyn made it impossible that he—the Waler—could be matured in time.

In general, Miss Joscelyn was a very sensible girl, who never overtaxed her constitution by attempting impossibilities. So she had one touching interview with the Waler, and definitely decided *that* was impossible. And by that time she had heard from Colonel Calverly.

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He had not been nearly as much surprised by her father's death as she was, though he was probably far more grieved by it. He had known Jack Joscelyn all his life, and she had hardly known him at all. But the Don knew well that his friend had had heart disease, and many times Joscelyn had said to him : " If I go out suddenly, you 'll see to my little girl, won't you ? "

" I hope you don't very much dislike children," the Don had said to Jim-Jams, " but I 've heard to-day of the death of a very old chum of mine, and his little girl will have to come here ; there 's no other home for her."

Now the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey did very specially dislike children, but it was not his bungalow, and he could not very well say so.

Then Colonel Calverly wrote to the second in command of the Pioneers at Kohàt, and enclosed a note for the late Colonel Joscelyn's daughter, whom he supposed to be twelve or thirteen, and who really had been, seven or eight years previously.

Whether the prudent Kathleen understood from that note the mistake Colonel Calverly had made may not now be determined. Personally, I have always thought she did. So has Mrs. Pillitt—but then Pillitt went silly about the girl. If she did perceive any mistake, she did nothing to rectify it. Indeed, her letter to the Colonel was babyish.

So it came to pass that Kathleen Joscelyn bade farewell to Kohàt and went to reside at Katàra in the Deccan, and the Pioneers missed her extremely ; but Mrs. Pentecost was delighted, and so was Mrs. Malody ; and the two Playne-Hedd girls kissed each other for sheer gladness and lightness of heart.

The Waler saw her off, and, as for the flower she

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gave him at the station, he wore it always, and when he was killed in the punitive expedition against the Pink Mountain people, they found it round his ridiculous neck in a badly-made and much kiss-stained case formed of a small white glove that could never have been honestly come by.

CHAPTER IV.

CASSANDRA.

WHEN Miss Joscelyn, on her way south, had passed Delhi she felt herself in the home counties. Most Anglo-Indians returning from northern border stations do. As for the state of Baroda, that was positively suburban, and the troops of large grey monkeys chasing the leisurely express affected her as the sight of costermongers' donkeys might affect the Londoner who finds himself again within the four-mile radius after a six-weeks' exile in North Britain.

At Ajmir a globe-trotter and his wife had joined her, and would not be dislodged. They were of boundless amiability and thirsted to explain themselves. Their name they determined she should know was Troy—Mr. and Mrs. 'Erbert Troy of Mill Hill. Did the young lady know Mill Hill? It was a delightful part. Did not the young lady wonder why ever they were in India? Well, Mr. Troy he enjoyed very Poor 'Elth—and he did not appear to enjoy it intensely—and they were travelling *for* his 'Elth. They had already been travelling twelve months, and had seen all the United States and San Francisco, as well as the Falls of Niagara, which are not in the United States, though they had always thought they were. Now did not the young lady think they were in the United States? They had also seen Japan, where they had met a very nice

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gentleman called Robinson—but perhaps the young lady knew him—who had also been under the impression that the Falls of Niagara were in the United States. And now they were in India, and didn't the young lady find it very fatiguing, especially Delly and the Coo-Tub, and Aggrer and the Tadge? How did the young lady like the Tadge? She had not seen it! Was it not then necessary to see the Tadge? and the other place—oh yes, Futt-paw-see-cree; especially that other place, for it was thirty miles in a Garry—the Garry man said. And *did* the young lady consider Kellner's Hotel at Delly or Laurie's at Aggrer comfortable—what she really *called* comfortable?

Throughout Rajputana did their ceaseless babble flow. And after dinner at Palanpur they insisted on getting back into the same carriage as Miss Joscelyn. Not till Bombay were they to be shaken off. There at Colaba she saw the last of them, beset by gari-walas, and waiting for the guard. But the guard was talking to an elderly gentleman in a Terai hat, who was asking after a little girl—a young lady—from Delhi.

Poor dear Colonel Calverly! He had had confused notions as to kissing the little girl—the young lady—from Delhi; and then of driving with her to purchase a doll in one of the shops near the Frere fountain. Did Treacher sell dolls?—the Colonel really could not remember. At all events one could get large native dolls, or rather plaster dwarfs, with the heads of giants and countenances of criminal lunatics, at Ramswamy's in Meddows Street.

Well, that difficulty at all events was obviated. There would be no necessity to provide a doll for the young lady from Delhi, and there would be no necessity to kiss her. The Colonel almost wished——

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“ To Hutchinson Sahib’s, Bassein Lodge, Malabar Hill,” he said to the gari-wala, into whose gari he had handed Miss Joscelyn. Another gari with her baggage had been sent on to the Boree Bunder—I beg its pardon, the Victoria Terminus of the G.I.P. Railway to Poona.

Colonel Calverly had been in India two-thirds of his life, and could talk thirteen of its languages, so he spoke English to the Bombay gari-wala. Had he just landed at the Apollo Bunder from one of Her Majesty’s Indian troopships he would have treated the native to such erudition as he had gleaned on the voyage out from *Roger’s Shilling Hindustani Manual*, and would probably have said—

“ Hi ! gari-wàla ! Hutchinson-Sahib-kà-gar ko jào : jaldì-jào ; Bassein Lodge, Malabar Hill, ke phàs ! ”

Colonel Calverly was rather silent as they drove round Back Bay, behind the Secretariate, the University, the post-office and the telegraph office to Malabar Hill. He was thinking over his plans, and by the time they had passed the Tower of Silence and turned into the compound of Mr. Hutchinson’s bungalow he had arranged them.

Mr. Alexander Hutchinson, as all the world knows, is editor of the *Bombay and Salsette Overland Mail*, and enjoys Rs. 5000 per mensem, which enables him to live with great comfort in his unexceptionable bungalow on Malabar Hill, especially as he is a widower. He is Scotch, and he is economical ; so when his wife died within five months of their marriage it is thought he was so shocked at the combined expenses of the wedding and the funeral that he would not risk any repetition of them. So he had asked his sister, Miss Jean, to come out

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and keep house for him, and saved himself half the three hundred a year he had allowed her previously.

Hutchinson Sahib was in, and so was Mistress Jean—rather a gaunt and grizzled dame, who looked as if she was feeling the cold severely, which was hardly possible.

Presently Hutchinson Sahib led forth Miss Joscelyn to admire the view. There was the lighthouse—Colaba Lighthouse; and that was the Afghan War Memorial Church—not this last affair, you know, but the other. Those? Oh, those were the Colaba Lines. What regiment? South Riding; no, they left last week in the *Tigris*, and had been relieved by Prince Teck's Own Welsh Borderers. That big yellow building was the new Apollo Bunder Hotel, and that half-kiosk, half-Swiss cottage affair, the Bombay Yacht Club. Could she see Elephanta—the small, steep island out there, covered with wood? Horrid place, full of snakes and Buddhist remains. Must be unhealthy? Oh, he didn't mean *human* remains. The mountains away back were in the Konkan; and round, right round, to the left was Mazagon and Byculla—only you couldn't see it from where they were standing. . . .

"Now, Miss Jean," said the Colonel, "you must help me a bit. Of course, as soon as I heard of poor Joscelyn's sudden death, I wrote and offered a home to his child. It was an understood thing I was to look after her. But I thought she was in short frocks, and would want dolls; whereas she's a grown-up young lady, and wants—what do you call it?—a chaperon."

Miss Jean grunted and stroked the end of her nose with her thimble.

"You'll help me a bit, won't you?"

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“ You mean go off up the Poona Ghauts with you to-night to Katàra ? ”

Colonel Calverly pleaded the soft impeachment.

“ Then, indeed, I ’ll do nothing of the kind for you or all the orphans in Asia,” said the lady with decision. “ But leave the lassie here and go you home to Katàra to-morrow. Next week I don’t mind bringing her up there. There ’s a big Tamasha at Ganesh Kind on the 13th, and Sandy has to be there of course. So he can see me and the lassie safe as far as Poona, and you ’ll just drive to Katàra Station on the Southern Mahratta to meet us — on Friday that ’ll be. And that ’s all I ’ll do for you. . . . But you ’d better by far send the girl back to where she came from—yes, or pay her passage home. For any sake, Don, don’t marry her,” the old lady concluded pathetically, nearly wearing a hole in her nose with the thimble.

“ Dear me ! ” said the Don, blushing furiously. “ I hadn’t dreamt of such a thing ! ”

Miss Jean shook her head gloomily.

“ You soon will do—in fact,” she added, sharply eyeing him, “ I see it ’s a lie already. Lord love you for a fool, Don ! ”

So some of Miss Joscelyn’s baggage had to be fetched up again after all from the Boree Bunder.

“ Eh, sirs ! what blind idiots they men are,” groaned Miss Jean Hutchinson to herself as she tired her head for dinner. “ Guid help the puir auld softie wi’ that fine lassie. Soon she ’ll hae him round her finger . . . but if ae auld fule must needs have her, it shall na’ be—Sandy ! ”

CHAPTER V.

KATÀRA.

As nearly as I can remember, it is thirteen miles from the city and cantonment of Katàra to the station of that name on the Southern Mahratta Railway.

As everything else which it will be my business to relate in the course of this narrative took place in or near that city and cantonment, you may as well be told something about it, while Miss Jean Hutchinson and Miss Kathleen Joscelyn are being brought up the Ghauts to Poona.

Once upon a time Katàra was the capital of a large and powerful kingdom, ruled over by rich and powerful kings, who dispensed any amount of justice there, not in the least caring to retain any for their own use. Unless I mistake, they were of the Brahmin caste, and inordinately devout to the mild and kindly goddess Devi—usually painted vermilion to typify blood, and with a handsome necklace of skulls—or Parwati, or Kàli, and her husband Shiva. Beside their palace in the city these Brahminy kings had a fortress castle overlooking it, that Nature had made impressive enough for them. When there were no devil-guns it must have been something like impregnable.

Of what does the station consist ?

Well, there 's a Resident, in the large bungalow, with a semaphore and Union Jack on it on the Towli Road, beyond the parade ground ; and a judge,

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whose bungalow near the Roman Catholic church has been said to be perfection ; and an assistant judge, who lives somewhere, called Kinahan, but known as LL. in the station. There was a doctor—Pillitt to wit, of the Indian Medical : a regiment of native infantry, whose officers mostly varied. The colonel, however, was perennial, and so was the second in command. And there was a detachment. At present it was a very small detachment of Prince Leiningen's Own Channel Islanders (Royal Tasmanians), late the 112th Regiment, commanded by Captain the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey. There was, of course, a parson, whose legal name was Epps ; he was, however, called "Grateful—Comforting" in civil life. The only use of a surname in India is that it sometimes furnishes hints for an appropriate nickname. Not always though ; sometimes the name in common use has no connection whatever with the surname. Mrs. Epps, for instance, was universally known as the Empress, merely because it was her delight to wear on the summit of her enormous head the smallest hard felt hat she could raise in Asia, which at once reminded the spectator of the minute crown as worn by the Empress on a Jubilee rupee or two-anna bit. But neither clergyman nor clergywoman has any particular part in this story.

CHAPTER VI.

INFANT MARRIAGE.

WHEN Colonel Calverly made up his mind to propose to Miss Joscelyn there is no doubt he decided to do a very foolish thing. From the day that she arrived in the station, the station said that there could be but one end to it, and the station would have been justly incensed if any other end had happened to come about. Nevertheless, when it was publicly made known that Katàra had prophesied truly, Katàra was disgusted.

Miss Jarndyce, the sister of the second-in-command (who had been brought out almost on purpose), affected, indeed, delight. But very gladly would she have bitten Miss Joscelyn instead of the rim of her black-wood clothes-press. The other ladies of the station openly said it was sickening, and even the men honestly thought the Don was a fool for his pains.

When an old man marries a young girl he generally is. But Colonel Calverly's mistake was due to something better than an old man's infatuation for a pretty face. He had pledged himself to give a home to the orphan child of his friend: how else, after all, could he do it? He had certainly never dreamt of marrying the little girl—"the young lady from Delhi"—whom he had gone to meet at the Colaba terminus of the B. B. & C. I. Railway. And it was not his fault that she turned out to be a young woman whom he could hardly provide with a home

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in his bungalow otherwise than by offering to make her its mistress.

Miss Jean Hutchinson could not remain to chaperon them for ever; and, indeed, had grown very restive long before the expiration of the six weeks she did stop. And there was no one else whom Colonel Calverly knew of that might have taken her place. No doubt all would have been well if Miss Joscelyn had married or become engaged to someone else during the six weeks of Miss Jean's chaperonage. But she did not. And to tell the truth, there was really no one just then in Katàra for her to marry. Pillitt of the Indian Medical would have married her gladly, but Mrs. Pillitt would, of course, not permit it. And, if you had given him time, perhaps the judge might. But the judge was nothing if he was not deliberate. And then he was every bit as old as the Colonel: and even if time had been given him would not have grown younger. Kinahan was a bachelor too, and was the brief epitome of every virtue; but when brevity only runs to five foot seven, girls like Miss Joscelyn will not hear of it. There really was no one for her to marry. Jim-Jams? Well, Jim-Jams was, as it happened, away from the station. And even when in it he had nothing but his pay to live on.

Therefore I maintain there was a good deal of excuse for the Don. And having said that I will repeat that he was inexcusable. It was certain to end in mischief, and all Katàra and the world knows to what it did lead.

"Kathleen," he said, "I am not fool enough to think there's anything about me to catch a young girl's fancy; but if you will give to me, *faute de mieux*, the right to be the guardian of your happiness, your happiness will be very precious to me. And,

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after all, dear child, there is this advantage in my being so old—that it is pretty sure, when I am gone from you, you will still have time enough for love and romance.”

It is probable that when Colonel Calverly so spoke he had not any special thought or intention of quitting this valley of tears incontinently—even to make room for love and romance in the life of his widow. What he said was stale enough, and the girl’s reply was also such as has many a time been made before.

“ Dear Colonel Calverly ! God knows I know you are too good for me, and I will give you my life to keep for me with a certainty of finding it, in your keeping, full of happiness ! ”

Perhaps in a way they were each sincere enough.

So Miss Jean Hutchinson went back to administer the household of her brother ; and Captain the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey, who was still on leave, read with eyes that stared like a shrimp’s the announcement in the *Pioneer* of the marriage of Colonel Hubert Calverly, of the 73rd Bombay Infantry, to Kathleen Mildred, only child of the late Colonel Jack Joscelyn, at Katàra, Deccan.

“ Great Scott ! ” he whistled. “ The man ’s gone in for infant marriage ! s’welp me ! ” He was not refined in his speech, and, you see, he thought the little girl whom the Don had adopted was aged eleven or twelve years.

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD FRIENDS.

WHEN Captain the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey rejoined for duty he left Poona by the train that starts for Belgaum about five in the afternoon. He therefore did not get in till nearly midnight, and saw no one at Katàra till he was shaking hands with Colonel Calverly.

Jim-Jams was, of course, not going to remain an inmate of the Don's bungalow. But the Colonel had written saying, "Though I am married, there is plenty of room for you here while you are looking about for quarters to suit you. So we shall expect you on the twentieth." Jim-Jams was not slow to note the changes in the bungalow. It had been rather wild, but now a general air of smartness pervaded it. The infant-wife was evidently quite alive to her position as Mrs. C. O. The infant-wife was, of course, in bed long ago. But who was this? What was the Colonel saying?

"My wife, Jim: Kathleen, let me introduce Captain de Tracey to you."

A large, blonde vision arose upon the astonished young man. Piles of yellow hair, great pale blue eyes, and acres of clear waxen complexion. This the infant-wife! Why, she must be three and twenty! Teeth large and white, large white hands plentifully ringed: and a large smile. The Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey himself was lean and black: close, crisp,

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curly hair, black as night ; eyes of the dead-black of jet, and a skin of a fine healthy brownness. Mrs. Calverly just suited him ; in ten years she would be fat, and in less than ten she would be coarse, but that he knew not. Meanwhile she filled the eye with shape and colour, and it satisfied him. He was not a young man of refined tastes, neither was he a good man. But for all the misery and crime that was to come it seems to me that he was not wholly responsible. On the present occasion he was merely astonished. His mind acted slowly, and just at present he could not get beyond that. Colonel Calverly saw his surprise and was amused, guessing very well the cause of it. When Colonel Calverly had said : “ Jim, I hope you don’t very much dislike children, but an old chum of mine is dead, and his little girl will have to come here,” he had not failed to see that Captain de Tracey was bored. And when Jim-Jams had gone on leave, the Colonel had guessed it was to get out of the way of “ the baby.”

As for Mrs. Calverly, she too saw that the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey was taken aback, and made up her mind that he was dazzled. He appeared to be a nice young man, and would make quite an agreeable playfellow. She liked dark men, and one could see at a glance that his clothes were imported ; nothing durzi-made about those trousers ! In short, Jim-Jams and Mrs. Calverly were mutually pleased with each other, and they soon became very intimate.

The Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey did not hurry away from the Calverlys’ bungalow. And even when he had left it he continued to be very intimate.

“ A little banjo is all very well,” he would say at first, in excuse for the frequency of his visits, “ but Menzies plays from breakfast till he goes to the

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Gymkhana, and it palls a little. I 'm so glad neither you nor the Colonel are musical."

Oh no, she was not at all musical. And as for the Colonel, he knew "God save the Queen" because people took off their hats at it, but he did not know any other tune.

"We are *always* glad to see you!" she said graciously, with a smile so large and sweet as to give a singular force to the plural pronoun.

In process of time it was an admitted fact that Jim-Jams and "the Calverlys" were very "thick" indeed. Now there were two people in the station who disapproved exceedingly of this intimacy. And they were Achchi Singh and the young man who had such an unreasonable resemblance to Colonel Calverly. But it was hardly likely Mrs. Calverly would regulate her conduct by the opinion of her husband's butler, or that of a half-caste clerk in the Katàra Treasury. Was it? And, as it happened, they kept their opinion to themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

UMBRA MORTIS.

A BLACK shadow fell over the Valley of Katàra, beneath which it sat still in terror and amazement. It was the shadow of a man riding on a pale horse. Some said he was a king, some said he was nothing but a reaper. Some called him friend, some foe, but all agreed that he was strong and inexorable. He appeared suddenly in the midst of the city, and the dead silence of middle night was broken by the cries wherewith they greeted him. In the morning he had ridden away with an old man and two children on the saddle-bow before him. But at night he came back galloping. And the narrow, fetid streets of the bazaar gave back the noise of his horse-hoofs. He rode carelessly on his pale horse, and trampled the little children as he passed, and the grey old men who could not fly from him. But that made no difference. Fly as they would, he galloped faster; and the strongest he laid low as easily as the weaker.

And the humour of him !

“ It’s the butcha he came for,” said the wrinkled hag, drawing the white cloth over the dead grand-child. “ He likes tender flesh, and warm ; he hath not relish for the dry and aged.”

But he heard her ; smiling, stooping from his saddle-tree with his ear by the tatti. And lifting the tatti he looked on her, and with his eyes he mocked her, and with his chill breath he froze the

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slow blood and dried up the marrow of her shaking bones.

"*Idhár áo,*" he whispered. "*Daro mat.* Fear not." And ruthlessly with his long arms he drew her—drew her shrieking to sit before him as he galloped on his pale horse through the city.

The poor besotted rajah quaked in his palace and swore to Devi that he would build her a new temple at Towli, a brand-new temple raddled all over, out of his next quarter's pension from the queen-empress, if but she would spare him. And lest the Hindu gods should have grown rusty, he vowed also to Beebee Miriam that he would give her a statue in the Catholic church here in Katàra, a beautiful crown like the one he had seen on her statue in the Bara church at Goa. And one or other of them heard him, for the pale king spared him (perhaps for pity at seeing a thing so much paler), and he did not die. Only his wife Saràswati, and (the gods are good) he had others. Wherefore he sent secretly the dead ranee's necklace (of big amethysts, three rows, strung on three strings of seed-pearls) to the Goanese priest of the Catholic Mission, and it was bound round the forehead of the big statue of the Madonna, and the native Catholics were enraptured. For that was cheaper than to build a big new temple, raddled all over, on the river bank at Towli—where in all conscience there were temples enough already.

But still day after day the shadow lay over the Valley of Katàra, and it was the monstrous shadow of a man who rode ruthlessly, riding on a pale horse. At night the noise of his riding echoed through the narrow mud-ways of the bazaar, and by day they sat cowering in silence lest he should espy them. For none wanted to go with him, even if he were a king, riding out with him into the darkness that lies around

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the world : the warm world that they knew, where their friends were. “ Truly the light is sweet,” they said, “ and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to see the sun.” And they had no thought of plagiarism, or thought that they were but echoing the cry of a poet who sang while the vedas were being written.

CHAPTER IX.

“GOD FORGIVE HER!”

At last the shadow passed away from the Valley of Katàra, and people congratulated each other that they were still alive. As it happened, the shadow had hardly fallen on the cantonment, only on the native city. But the dread of it had been everywhere. And here and there to the godowns also the rider on the pale horse had come, stealthily, and taken one or two—a Goanese cook perhaps, or an ayah, perhaps only a sweeper—but someone. He had ridden away now, and the last echoes of his galloping had died away. In a very little while he would be forgotten. He had been gone some days, and was already nearly forgotten, when the parson called at the Calverlys' bungalow and was explaining to the Colonel the form of prayer for thanksgiving he proposed using at church next Sunday—after the second lesson would be best, he thought. But the Colonel, perhaps by reason of his Hindu heterodoxies, did not seem to take any lively interest in the matter. And “Grateful—Comforting” departed rather huffed.

Mrs. Calverly departed to the Gymkhana almost immediately, and as soon as she was gone the Colonel went into his own room and flung himself rather wearily on the bed.

“Master sahib ill?” asked Achchi Singh.

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“ *Jehannum-ko-jao !* ” answered the Colonel with great sweetness. “ *Bolo mat.* ”

But Achchi Singh peered inquisitively at his master and did not go there. He went out instead at the back of the bungalow and through a hole in the cactus hedge on to the parade ground, then he ran. And he did not stop till he reached the Pillitt bungalow on the Towli Road.

“ Doctor sahib *gar-men hai ?* ” he gasped.

“ *Hai.* ”

“ What ’s up ? ” asked the doctor, hearing himself demanded. “ Whew ! Not the Colonel sahib ? ”

“ Yes, sahib ; it ’s the Colonel. ”

Half an hour later Mrs. Calverly drove home, for Miss Jarndyce and the judge and a few others were coming to tea. You know that as one comes out of the tennis-ground the hedge hides anyone from those who may be coming in till they are almost face to face. The Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey was seeing Mrs. Calverly to her carriage, but as it happened they were not speaking ; and they heard two men talking who were approaching hurriedly.

“ Yes, it ’s back, and the Don has it. I ’ve just seen Pillitt. ”

Mrs. Calverly uttered a little cry, and Jim-Jams looked at her.

“ Good God ! she ’s glad, ” he thought ; and though it was by no means chilly, he shivered.

Then they met the men.

“ I overheard what you said, ” stammered Mrs. Calverly with every symptom of distress and terror.

“ Is it true—about my husband ? ”

“ I had no notion you were here. I am afraid it is true . . . but perhaps . . . ”

She uttered another little cry, not loud, but quite a different one, and said miserably—

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"I must go at once to him."

"Hadn't someone better go with you — Captain de Tracey, perhaps?"

"Oh, no, no! I would rather go alone."

"Yes, you'd better go alone," said Jim-Jams gravely.

He did not go back on to the ground, but walked quickly towards the Jarndyces' bungalow to tell them not to go to tea at the Calverlys'. He shivered again, and this I will say for him, that if a prayer of his could have saved the man who had always been good to him, he would with all sincerity have put it up. "God forgive her, that was a horrible look on her face." One thing he resolved, and that was that until the Don was well again—or it was all over—he would not go near their bungalow. And it was no dread of infection that lay at the root of that determination. Poor Jim-Jams! Nevertheless he knew that if the Don died he should marry Kathleen.

CHAPTER X.

DEVOTION.

MRS. CALVERLY was horribly afraid. She was a coward by nature, and she had none of a wife's generous affection to counterbalance a woman's natural fear. But all the more because she knew that in her soul she was disloyal to him was she in terror of this feeling showing itself visibly.

"There is always danger," the doctor answered; "but there is as little danger yet as there could be in any case of it. He has it most favourably. All the conditions are most favourable."

And with the slightest possible fluctuations his report was the same always.

"Pillitt thinks the Don will stick in," said Menzies, coming into their bungalow, settling himself into a long chair, and cocking his legs gracefully over the arm of it. He had his banjo and began tuning it. Captain the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey was understood to express—very unequivocally—his pleasure at the intelligence.

"H'm," thought Captain Menzies. And perhaps his look was too close an index of his thought, for Jim-Jams reddened and said apologetically—

"He's been very decent to me—the Don has!"

"Oh, yes; he's been decent enough to you, I know, Jim."

Captain de Tracey put his hands in his pockets and began to whistle. Presently he strolled out into

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the compound, and began to throw stones meditatively at a pariah dog that was lurking in the bushes.

"Fables de la Fontaine," thought Captain Menzies, "only he can't see it." And Captain Menzies, who was rather a metaphysical officer, wiped the smile from his mouth to make room for "Dinah Do," the strains whereof were soon uplifted on the breeze.

Meanwhile Mrs. Calverly nursed her husband with much assiduity, and Katàra was not a little edified.

"Especially as anyone can see she's in a blue funk all the while," said Menzies; only he said it to himself, for he had an idea that no one but he *had* seen it. And though he was very "noticing," as the nurses say, he was a prudent child too, and apt to tell more secrets to Captain Menzies than to all the rest of the cantonment. Of course, Mrs. Calverly did not do all the nursing—her ayah and she did most of it between them, but Achchi Singh insisted on helping.

Now Mrs. Calverly detested Achchi Singh, and so did Kasi the ayah. He watched her ceaselessly, and she knew it. He guessed her secret indifference to his master, and she knew it. Whereas Achchi Singh adored the Colonel sahib with a limitless adoration—and she knew that also. Perhaps most of all for this last reason she hated him. Nevertheless, Achchi Singh helped to nurse his master.

"Good Lord, what's that?"

Captain Menzies and the second-in-command were going into the parade ground; and it was Captain Menzies who spoke.

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Now the Protestant church at Katàra possesses two bells, and on occasions of great public rejoicing they are clattered deliriously. One of these was now tolling dolorously. The two men stopped dead and listened.

"It can't be poor Calverly."

The second-in-command was but human, and he *was* second, you see.

"But he was out of all danger. Pillitt told me so last night at Kinahan's."

Nevertheless it was the Colonel. Pillitt came hurrying into the parade ground.

"Dismiss the men," he said with a chalky face; "it's the Colonel. I went in there twenty minutes ago, and Mrs. Calverly and I went into his room together; she only went to lie down an hour and a half ago; her ayah was with him—but she'd fallen asleep; and we found him dead. He had been dead about an hour, and the *rigor mortis* was quite declared."

Pillitt was a very keen doctor, and a clever one; he felt this professionally very acutely.

"I never knew such a case in my days," he groaned; "last night I turned in there on my way home from Kinahan's, and he was doing splendidly. In a week at the outside I should have taken his name off the sick-list. It fairly beats me, and that's the truth of it. The blow to his wife is terrible."

"Yes?"

The doctor turned to Menzies, who had spoken.

"Yes, quite terrible. She fainted dead at the sight of him. You see it's so horribly unlooked for. But I must go back there."

"Poor Don!" said the second-in-command. "I wish it could have come some other way—by Jove,

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I do." But this observation also was addressed solely to himself, for he was not thinking of the manner of the Don's death, but of the manner of his own promotion. And he was going back alone to his own bungalow.

"Captain Menzies, is it true?"

The young man looked up; it was the clerk in the Katàra Treasury with the inconsequent resemblance to Colonel Calverly.

"About the Colonel? I am afraid it is," he answered kindly. "It is sad news for all of us."

"It is sad news to me," said the clerk. "Thank you, sir," and he walked off.

Captain Menzies turned to go home.

"That's a rum chap," he thought. "And he looked rum. By Jove, he is like the old boy, and his voice is like too. Well, perhaps I should look rum if——"

The Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey overtook him.

"Good God, Menzies, this is awful!"

"It's pretty bad," said Menzies, with British moderation of statement. De Tracey, you see, was Irish.

"I wish to God he hadn't died," cried he. And there was no mistake as to his sincerity.

"Yes," said Menzies curiously.

"Upon my soul I do."

Menzies thoroughly believed, but thoroughly disliked these protestations.

"Well, Jim," he said, "we all do. There's not a man in the station who doesn't."

Captain de Tracey looked uneasy. He shot a swift glance of suspicion at the other man.

"Nor a woman either!" he said foolishly.

Menzies nodded.

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“Of course—nor a woman either,” he assented innocently.

They turned into the bungalow. Captain Menzies picked up his banjo, but put it down again. He sat on the table instead, and began to whistle.

“He was awfully decent to me,” said Jim-Jams.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HORROR OF KATÀRA.

IF Katàra was shocked at the news of Colonel Calverly's death, consternation fell on it at the intelligence that he was to be cremated. Here in England it is far from being a popular mode of disposal of the dead, in spite of the very prosaic burning-house at Woking. But in India there are a whole different set of reasons against it. It is like publicly marrying a native. And the cremation of Colonel Calverly was not to take place in a smart new crematorium at the end of an orthodox funeral with hearse and mourning coaches, and the Protestant Burial Service.

It appeared that he had made his will, leaving everything to his wife, at the time of his marriage, and with that had been found a loose sheet of paper containing a brief but absolute command, that in the event of his death his body should be burned, with as little delay as possible, on the river bank at Towli—"in the manner of the country," he had added emphatically. This document was signed and dated the afternoon of the day on which he had been taken ill. It must have been written about half an hour after the Rev. Epps had left his bungalow and his wife had gone out to the Gymkhana. He had sealed it with the signet ring he always wore, and though the writing showed signs of agitation,

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and of having been the work of a man in great bodily pain, it was unmistakably his.

“He often told me that he would wish to be burned on the river-bank at Towli,” said Mrs. Calverly. “Once he showed me the very place he wished—just below the ranee’s temple at the foot of the steps—Ghâts, he called them.”

Katàra is not easily scandalised. A readiness to be scandalised is not the most crying fault of Anglo-Indian society. But Katàra was unutterably scandalised now. What would the natives think when Sahib-Log took to be burned at the Ghâts like natives? Katàra read a sardonic triumph in its servants’ eyes already. And the second-in-command, who was really not a bad fellow at bottom, and old-fashioned to boot, kicked his butler incontinently on the strength of it. Doubtless in these dangerous days the native would “summons” him, so he was determined to get the worth of his fifty rupees while he was about it, and kicked him thoroughly. “That’ll teach him to expect no Hindu foolery from the new Colonel,” panted the second-in-command when he had finished.

But all that did not stop the late Colonel’s body from being disposed of as he had directed. And the Resident could not stop it either. He did his best, but he failed. He had an idea that when the Supreme Government heard of it—which it certainly would—it would visit on him the permission of such levelling doings in his district. And the home Government, too. If it had been a Radical Government at home, a Radical Viceroy here—but they were both as Tory as common sense could make them. The Resident of Katàra saw himself a marked man—and marked, alas! with a most undesirable distinction—as the head of a district in

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which the first European officer broke down the wholesome difference between natives and Sahib-Log, and let himself be burned up, like a bundle of weeds, on the river-bank.

He interviewed the widow without losing an instant, but she was inexorable.

"I know it to have been my poor husband's desire," she reiterated, "and it is my sacred duty to see that his desires are not set aside when he can no longer enforce them."

The Resident was eloquent, but Mrs. Calverly was unmoved by his eloquence. He became pathetic, but the lady grew scornful.

"You are thinking of nothing but yourself," she said, with considerable candour, "and I intend to think of nothing but my poor husband's wishes. . . . Really, at such a time, such an interview is most painful," she added.

The Resident moved reluctantly to go. But he did not go till he had gained a concession. As it seemed to him, a very important concession.

The body of Colonel Calverly should be burned, as he had directed, on the bank of the river at the holy place of Towli; at the foot of the stone steps leading up to the ranee's temple, on the spot he had himself chosen. But first there should be a funeral—a decent European funeral service in the Protestant church in the cantonment. The whole station should attend that service; the regiment commanded by the late Colonel should accompany the coffin from the bungalow to the church.

"And you will yourself attend the service?" he suggested, pleadingly.

"Of course. I shall be chief mourner."

"Of course!" assented the Resident, a trifle taken aback, but delighted. "The usual volleys

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will be fired over the grave," he said, "into which the coffin will have been lowered. . . . After the volleys the funeral party will disperse, and you will do what you wish. . . . I shall report the proceedings in full up to that point. Of anything that may take place afterwards I shall have no cognisance whatever."

Mrs. Calverly bowed, and the Resident departed in triumph. He felt that a first-rate diplomatist was thrown away on Katàra. Possibly Mrs. Calverly was a bit of a diplomatist also.

The Resident evidently presumed that she would have her husband's body taken from the grave after the volley-firing and dispersal of the funeral party. But she had a notion that to steal bodies from graves where they had been buried was a felony, and, on the whole, she thought it might be better to send the coffin without the body to the church, especially as she felt confident her husband had never contemplated any Protestant and European funeral over his remains at all.

CHAPTER XII.

TOWLI.

IF the Resident flattered himself that people would believe the European funeral to be the final and only one, he was considerably out of his reckoning. Most probably he did not so flatter himself. All he desired was that he himself should have no official knowledge of any subsequent proceedings. And he hoped people would, to him at all events, hold their tongues on the subject. Of course, all European Katàra attended the European obsequies. But the later ceremony was to be ignored officially by the cantonment. Unofficially and out of uniform, however, the cantonment had every intention of going to Towli as a spectator. No sooner, therefore, was the last volley fired over the "grave," and the funeral party dismissed, than Katàra made haste back to its bungalow, and hurriedly changed from uniform to mufti.

Towli is perhaps a mile and a half or two miles from Katàra. And straight and white and hot is the road that leads to it, past the Residency gardens and the bungalow where Mrs. Pillitt gives her dinner-parties, luxurious with Europe goods and prodigal of tinned meats.

Whether Towli is a village or a city I cannot tell. Judging by its extreme minuteness I should say a city. Anyway, it is a sacred city, and consists almost entirely of temples. Two rivers meet there

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—the Yena and the Krishna, and of course they are both sacred. The banks are very steep on either hand, and they are lined with temples, whose ghâts wade knee-deep in water in the rains, but stand high on the hot bank in the dry season. Looking up and down stream one sees great weird-shaped “ Deccany ” hills ; and in and out of the courts of the temples are holy banyan trees and pekul trees, such as that under which the Lord called Nathaniel. And there are monkeys, flippantly oblivious of the incarnations of Vishnu. And Brahmins, who will be gods when they are dead, but are not obtrusively divine at present.

In spite of having had to change its clothes, Katàra was at Towli before the funeral procession. With the latter came the regiment (all of it that was not on duty), but without side-arms or accoutrements. And with it also came the rajah, in semi-state, and attended by the princes of his family, who were all sober. A certain triumph was, or was supposed to be, written on their faces. Not even Sirdah Rajah Perthab Singh in all his glory had been privileged to attend the burning of one of the sahib-log. The body was in a bullock durnie, curtained with hangings of magnificent white silk, a blaze of gold needlework. This had been lent by the rajah, and was the ranee’s state equipage. It was drawn by six lovely oxen, of the sacred Brahmin breed, small and graceful like deer, bright and pure of colour, with conscious calm divinity in gait and mien. At the head of each walked a Sais, in garments and lungi of spotless white. Immediately behind, in a closed durnie drawn by two bullocks and closely curtained, came the dead man’s widow. Near the red monument of the dog who saved the rajah’s life the procession stopped and the body was lifted out.

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It lay upon a hand-bier of very light woodwork, covered with a silk fulkari plentifully wrought with gold. The body itself was swathed entirely in cloth of finest white linen, and was wholly covered with flowers, also chiefly white ; but here and there gleamed red the huge and splendid blossoms of the babul tree. Swiftly and in silence the body was carried down the steep path to the ghât of the ranee's temple, and thence to the water's edge. Swiftly the fuel cakes were set around and over it, till it was wholly hidden, and then the god Fire was brought. He breathed into the pyre, and with his long fierce tongue began to lick it, chuckling ; and then out across the rapid-flowing sacred river streamed a long thin veil of palest blue-white smoke, wherefrom the god Air received the dead man into his divine embrace.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOO SOON.

CAPTAIN ALEXANDER MENZIES of the Bombay Ducks and Captain the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey of the Royal Tasmanians were sitting in their bungalow after tiffin. Captain Menzies was now sufficiently recovered from the shock of Colonel Calverly's death to resume his performances upon the banjo, and he was playing upon that instrument. It did not appear that Captain de Tracey was doing anything. That is to say, he was sucking a cheroot, and moodily watching his companion, who appeared—but was not—quite unconscious of his scrutiny.

“Have you ever tried Beecham's pills?” Captain Menzies inquired presently, with great sweetness. “They are said to be worth a guinea a box, but you can get them for less at Sorabji's.”

Captain de Tracey scraped with one foot upon the ground.

“Funny chap!” he grunted sulkily.

“Livery?”

“Oh, do shut up! I've no doubt you're frightfully waggish, Menzies, but I'm not a witty fellow myself, and it palls.”

Captain Menzies looked wounded, and began to sing “Kathleen Aroon.”

Jim-Jams leapt up.

“Curse you, Menzies!” he shouted. “Will you shut up?”

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Captain Menzies demanded an explanation. He had tried conversation, only to be rebuffed ; he had fallen back on song—what was now his offence ?

“ Can’t you let that woman alone ? Now, at all events.”

“ My dear Jim-Jams ! You used not to object so very much to playful allusions to that ‘ woman ’ (since you put it so rudely) when she was somebody else’s wife ; now she ’s only somebody’s widow I should have thought it a more legitimate subject of friendly allusion—— ”

A Seedee boy entered, barefooted and silent, with a note which he gave to Jim-Jams. He took it carelessly, then reddened, and shot a furtive glance at Menzies, who was, however, absorbed in the tuning of his banjo.

“ All right.”

The young man got up and went into his bedroom.

Captain Menzies smiled.

“ No black edge to it, but it was from her all the same. Poor Jim-Jams ! He doesn’t want her a bit now he can have her. But he ’ll have to, I ’m thinking ! Lord, how she ’ll stick ! ”

Very cautiously he gave the peg one tiny screw more, then tried the string again.

“ By Jove, though, it ’s soon,” thought Captain Menzies.

In his bedroom, Captain de Tracey read the note again. “ Can you meet me while they ’re all at dinner—at the well ?—K.”

“ By Jove, though, it ’s horribly soon,” said Jim-Jams.

When he had gone back to Captain Menzies he pretended to read, and that officer was not thinking at all about him when he suddenly looked up.

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“Menzies,” he said, “you’re always rotting me about—about that woman. Of course, I was there a good bit, and of course I saw a lot of her, but on my soul it was absolutely platonic; if I were to die this minute,” he concluded, somewhat confusedly.

“Which I trust you won’t,” replied the other politely.

Nevertheless, Captain Menzies saw that he spoke sincerely; and Captain Menzies did not love Jim-Jams.

It has been said already that few men did like him very much. Whatever the average civilian Pharisee may think, a man who has the reputation of a drinker is seldom very popular in the Army.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRST TRYST.

ALL the cantonment was at dinner, with the exception of two persons. Those two persons were Mrs. Calverly and Captain de Tracey ; and to tell the truth, Katàra was thinking as little of them just then as of any two people in the Deccan. Some days had passed since the cremation of Mrs. Calverly's late husband. For a time she had been a good deal the topic of conversation, but now she was done with ; and Captain de Tracey never was much thought of.

Mrs. Calverly had chosen the time for her first tryst very prudently. Everyone was at dinner, either at the mess or in their bungalows. It was about as dark as it would be all night, and the moon was nearing her second quarter. There are two ways by which Mrs. Calverly might have gone from her bungalow to the well where Captain de Tracey was to meet her, but she chose the one that leads past the judge's. If when you come out of the judge's gate you turn north-east the road takes you to the city and the fort ; if you turn south-west it takes you past the Roman Catholic church and down a short steep hill to a bridge, beyond which the road rises again and trends back to the cantonment and the mess bungalow.

The little Catholic church looked white and ghostly in the moonlight as Mrs. Calverly passed it. They were expecting the Bishop of Poona to-morrow,

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and it was decorated with hideous wreaths and paper flowers in his honour. A triumphal arch in front already had W—E—L—C—(also in paper flowers) arranged upon it ; O—M—E would be added in the morning. Then Mrs. Calverly disappeared into the darkness beneath the trees where the road runs downhill. She was rather afraid of snakes here, and went delicately, like King Agag, but luckily with better results. Just where it was darkest, however, a deep sigh startled her, close at her elbow. It was only a buffalo lying in the grass at the roadside ; but Mrs. Calverly hurried past him. She had an idea that, for all their seeming gentleness, those buffaloes could poke most uncomfortably with their huge flat horns.

At the bottom of the little valley there were no trees except overhanging the bridge, and it was lighter. After the darkness out of which she had come it seemed quite light. The well, at which she thought she would have probably some minutes to wait, is about fifty yards to the left of the bridge, as she came, and you do not see it until you are pretty close to the bridge. The well is quite clear of trees, though there is a small thicket twenty yards or so from it, and when Mrs. Calverly came in sight of it the moonlight was falling full upon it.

So she saw at once she was not first at the place of tryst. He was leaning over the wall of the well, and looking down into the water, with his back to her. At the sound of her footstep he raised himself to his full height and turned round. Now Captain de Tracey was a very large man. He was by far the tallest man in Katàra, and his shoulders were very broad and powerful, but he was loosely built and rather awkward in his carriage. His uniform was that of ordinary infantry, except that being a royal regiment, the facings were blue. The man who now

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turned to face Mrs. Calverly was by no means tall, but slim, wiry and smart. He was in mess kit, but the facings on his sleeves and at his neck were white.

With a horrible sense of numbness Mrs. Calverly stood still, and the ground began to shiver beneath her feet. Immovably her eyes were riveted on that spare and well-known figure, waiting for her so ruthlessly by the well. That yonder silent shape was no reality, she knew full well ! Who so well as she knew that he was dead ?—knew that he must be dead, even had she not seen his body burned ? Great God ! And this was to be her punishment ! Ever so busily her brain worked, as if it were being lashed with whips into feverish activity. She felt with a horrible intelligence the full loathsomeness of meeting the man of whom she had so cruelly desired to free herself, here in the place of her first tryst with the man for whose sake she had longed to be rid of him.

High and cold and white the moon swam in the night sky, and flung her sad light over the highlands of the Deccan, and bathed in her pallid radiance the living and the dead. Could there be any error ? There could be none, as, growing impatient, the dead man slowly left the well and came, with well-remembered step, to meet her ; and the moonlight, catching his shoulders, showed a crown and two stars glittering thereon.

Ah ! what would she not have given to cry aloud ; but speech was frozen in her throat ! And if she could, if only she could, have turned and fled ! But her heavy feet seemed weighted with the world on which she stood. Fixed, and unmovable, in leaden silence she stood waiting while he came towards her. And now she could recognise the features of that face which she had thought to see only turned on her upbraiding at the bar of God's judgment. White

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and pale in the moonlight, nearer and nearer it came, with eyes fixed and wide staring in mute upbraiding now. To and fro she swayed and staggered drunkenly, and the sky swam, and the hills, and the trees beat at her like switches, and the moon and stars were broken, as when one breaks the clear surface of a lake their shattered image flies hither and thither and dances horribly. And so, with one low, choking, gurgling sob, she sank, deathly white and senseless, at the dead man's feet.

CHAPTER XV.

WATCHED.

WHEN Mrs. Calverly recovered consciousness, she found herself some yards from the place where she had fallen, and out of sight of the road.

Thither Captain de Tracey had carried her, not specially wishing that either or both of them should be seen there at such an hour by any chance passer-by. He had been puzzled and disquieted to find her lying there unconscious and alone, and, of course, had had no idea as to the length of time she had been thus. Probably it had been less than five minutes, but that he could not know. He had propped her up in a sitting posture against a tree, and had stood over her bewildered and disturbed, utterly without knowledge as to what should next be done. The faint seemed to him to continue a terrible time, and suddenly as his eyes wandered round in an aimless search for some means of revival, an unpleasant sensation of *being watched* came over him. It was senseless and unreasoning, he knew, and he was utterly ashamed of such folly, but there was a conviction, strong as instinct, grounded on no evidence of any sense, that out of the thicket eyes were fastened on him and the unconscious woman at his feet.

It was a horrid impression. There was an intense loneliness about the place and the night, and something infinitely lonelier in the presence of the swooned girl than if he had been veritably alone. And yet he

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saw no watcher and caught the gleam of no eyes peering from the bushes with the light of an inextinguishable hate and cruelty.

When Mrs. Calverly came to herself, she kept her own counsel as to the cause of her faint ; and the sound of her voice weakened somewhat the feeling of superstitious dread that had been creeping over her companion.

But she found him dull and by no means tender.

“ Was it not good of me to meet you so soon ? ”

“ Yes, very. But wasn't it rather—rather risky ? ”

“ Risky ? ”

“ Well, if we were seen, wouldn't people think it rather—rather soon, you know ? ”

She looked at him curiously.

“ Perhaps you find it too soon ? Apparently you were in no hurry ! ” She spoke in a very low voice, but with intense bitterness. It was easy to see that the young man was ill at ease, and had come to meet her simply at her request, without any great pleasure in the trust. What had come over him ? They had not met since that afternoon when coming out of the Gymkhana together they had heard of her husband's illness. He too remembered that.

It must not be supposed that they were still on the spot where Mrs. Calverly had recovered consciousness. She had taken his arm, and at once made him leave it, and they were now some distance from the place where she had, as she believed, seen that apparition.

“ Oh, Jim,” she said reproachfully, “ I thought you would be so glad ! Glad to see me, I mean, after so long—and now, now that I am free,” she ended in a whisper.

“ Of course I 'm glad,” he answered guiltily, but there was no gladness in his voice. He certainly had admired this girl, and had willingly enough flirted

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with her ; and to his taste she had seemed very good to behold. But a certain cloud had fallen upon her, and he *could* not rouse again yet the old feeling he had had for her. A certain look that he had seen upon her face when she first heard of her husband's illness had never ceased to haunt him ever since . . . and after all that dead man had been "awfully decent to him."

Poor Jim-Jams would have given a week's pay to be alone in his own bungalow with half the cantonment between him and the woman at his side. And yet he knew that he should marry her.

As for her, she loved him passionately, and he could not deceive her. She saw plainly that he was turning from her, and that knowledge fell like ice into her heart. Was it for this she had covered herself with the shadow of a great crime ?—for this that she had risked so much ?—for this that she was to be haunted by such a presence as that she had felt to-night ?

I think in the bitterness of that moment she would have given ten years of her own life to bring back again the dead man whom she had seen. But that she could not do. We can destroy—miserable that we are—but we can neither create nor recreate.

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAIN.

MRS. CALVERLY could not sleep.

Three days had passed since her meeting with Captain de Tracey, and *that other person* by the well ; and she had not seen either of them since. Her mind had been, of course, full of what she had seen before that faint in which Jim-Jams had found her ; and being alone in her widowhood and deep mourning, the opportunities had been ample of wearily puzzling—puzzling about what she would in truth have fain forgotten. She could, after all, come to no other decision than that it had been a simple delusion—probably a first stage in the unconsciousness that had later entirely fallen upon her. This explanation struck her as peculiarly reasonable, and even ingenious.

But in her own secret mind she knew that it was false. What she had seen was no delusion, but had been seen as truly with her physical eyes as she saw Achchi Singh watching her as he helped to wait upon her at dinner.

Dinner was over now, though, and Achchi Singh was asleep in his godown, and Mrs. Calverly would have very gladly been asleep too. But sleep was gone from her eyes ; and very tiresomely, as she lay wearily awake, would the old stale quotation din, din in her ears and even form itself upon her lips—

“ . . . Sleep no more.
Macbeth does murder sleep,—the innocent sleep.”

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No doubt she thought with a kind of feverish terror this was to be part of her punishment. Sleep was to be dragged from her. All the heaviness of sleep was to be hers without the oblivion. She was unutterably weary even now, and her eyes ached, but hold them fast closed as she would, they would reopen. Her eyelids felt thick and hot as if they were of horn. So she tossed from side to side, and now and then a low wretched murmur would break from her. She flung aside the mosquito curtains, but she could hear the abhorred buzz of one of those sweet insects somewhere in the room, and was fain to pull them down again.

And she thought of the plain indifference of the man for whom she had done so wickedly, and neither concerning that could she deceive herself. A kind of repulsion to her had been written on his face. Had he guessed? Of all people she would have felt safe concerning him! She had had an unacknowledged trust in the dulness of the man. For, passionately as she had loved him, she had known him to be a dull, slow-witted man. If *he* guessed! what would others . . . a horrible dew of abject terror and cowardice broke chill upon her. What was that upon the wall?

Her bed stood between two windows, and opposite its foot was an expanse of white wall. Whose shadow is that upon it? The shadow of a lean, spare man, bareheaded, with hands uplifted as of one who makes appeal to God for judgment.

Kneeling up in bed, she bent forward and flung up the mosquito curtain to see yet more plainly that which, God knows, she feared to see at all. For some few seconds the shadow stood there immovable, and then with a gesture of intense sadness the hands dropped, and the head drooped forward on the breast.

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Slowly it passed, but only to reappear upon the other patch of square white moonlit wall. Then it went.

Fearfully and with a slow reluctance, the haunted woman rose from her bed and crept guiltily to the window. It did not open to the ground, but she stood beside it, her cold hands dropped upon the sill, and gazed out into the moonlit night.

He was there. Slowly going from her, with head bent, and weary step, across the open lawn. Nearly opposite her was a gap in the cactus hedge, leading out on to the parade ground. Towards that the dead man walked. He was dressed in a rough suit of khaki, such as he had often worn, but his head was uncovered, and wintry white was his hair in the sad light of the moon. When he had nearly reached the cactus hedge he stopped. He seemed to listen, and then he turned towards her. She could not see his face well as he faced her, for the moon was behind him then, and shining on herself; but again he listened and half turned from her. The outline of the face, so familiar, and so impossible ever to forget, was touched with the silver light.

She saw now that he held something in his right hand that glistened as it caught the light. No one else could have told at that distance what it was. But she knew; and she knew that he would raise it to his lips. As he took it from his lips, he shuddered—yes, she could see him shudder—and across the empty garden in the dead silence of the night came the long sobbing whisper of a sigh.

He seemed now to be looking straight at her. She could not see his face, but as with burning eyes she watched him, there was in his attitude the silent expression of an unspeakable sadness, an unutterable reproach.

A sound close to her, a sound so slight that it might

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have been no more than the dropping of a beetle on a leaf, made her turn. There were—yes, there were two eager, curious eyes watching her from among the bushes, and as her own met them, a terror greater yet than she had felt in seeing again the man she had murdered made her skin creep and her heart beat sickeningly.

It was Achchi Singh, the man who ever watched her. There had been high doings at the Temple of Ganesh in the city, and he, being a very devout Hindu, had been assisting at them. But for some time he had been watching the Mem-Sahib standing at her window in the moonlight, and staring out with so strange a look into the empty compound. She was a strange woman, this young Mem-Sahib !

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPECTED.

A KIND of dull despair was rapidly taking possession of Mrs. Calverly.

She was between two terrors. The dread of a presence that would come to her oftener and more persistently, she knew, until she should have learned to look upon it as a sort of terrible condition of her life, and the sharp terror of temporal retribution.

Unutterably as she was afraid of the presence that would come to her by night, it was, I think, characteristic of the woman that she was distinctly more afraid of the discovery and punishment of her crime. She loved her life—it was miserable enough just now—but she clung to it with a passionate instinct of self-preservation. It was not the horrible publicity, the being brought to trial, to shame, and to execration that made her hand tremble and her tongue grow dry in her mouth. It was the physical terror of being hanged by the neck until she should be dead. She loved her large white body; she had always treated it well. She had never failed to consult its ease and comfort. She liked feeding it, and even now it was an appreciable aggravation of her wretchedness that she could not enjoy doing this as she used. She was a sensual, vulgar-minded woman, and pleasure had been her highest notion of happiness.

She loved Jim-Jams, at all events. Yes, with the

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love of a large white cow for a large black bull, she loved him fiercely. But she loved herself—and there was nothing of herself but that large yellow-haired body—best. Her love for Jim-Jams had been nothing else than an irresistible desire to be his wife. And it did not now sustain her, or prevent her clasping her great white neck shudderingly with her large soft hands, and shivering. And he still kept aloof.

During those days I fancy Mrs. Calverly was much more constantly present to the thoughts of Jim-Jams than he was to those of that lady. But she was not welcome there, and his thoughts were not very lover-like.

Perhaps he never had been in love with her. He was certainly not in love with her now. Nevertheless, it did not occur to him that he need not marry her. He had an instinct that she had determined to marry him as soon as she had been told of her husband's illness. And poor Jim-Jams knew that he had not the qualities which would enable him to resist doing what Mrs. Calverly had set her mind on.

So while he kept aloof, he was moody and not too sweet-tempered.

Menzies no longer chaffed him about Mrs. Calverly ; but he very sincerely wished that lady would take her admirer to reside with herself, since he was such indifferent company. Menzies had an idea that a crisis was approaching, for the development whereof he watched and waited.

On the day following the second visit of that accusing presence Mrs. Calverly received a note from Jim-Jams. She went into her bedroom to wash her hands before tiffin, and on lifting one of her hairbrushes she found the note underneath. It was in a small square envelope sealed with a small

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horseshoe seal that he had on his watch-chain. It was written on half a sheet of his regimental paper, and was very short:—

“ Must see and warn you. Suspected. Towli most unlikely place. There to-night same time.—
U. FITZU. DE TRACEY.”

The note was not addressed, though he had signed it in full.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RANEE'S TEMPLE.

MRS. CALVERLY'S hand shook as she made a show of helping herself to the dishes Achchi Singh and the other menservants handed her at tiffin. In truth, she felt sick, horribly and physically sick with a growing, over-mastering terror. Thoroughly like poor Jim-Jams in its incoherence, the note was all too easy of comprehension.

"Suspected." What had he to tell her? Whereof must he needs warn her? In the physical alarm for the safety of her neck, the wretched woman thought singularly little of its being at Towli that she must meet him. It was not the place she would for choice have fixed upon: but of that she recked little now. As for that presence, it had not spared her in her own bungalow; it could be no worse at Towli, and certainly at Towli during the hours of dinner there would be little fear of her meeting with Jim-Jams being observed by any white inhabitant of the valley of Katàra.

But many, many hours must pass before that at which she could meet him and hear that whereof he had to put her on her guard. Ceaselessly up and down her dim drawing-room she walked that livelong afternoon. People were beginning to call again, and though they only inquired, they waited while their cards were sent in, and seemed to expect to be asked in. They were not. Who suspected her?

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How could she tell? And perhaps in her ignorance might she not say something most fatal? She would see no one. But she could not read or work. She never had been a great reader. But for novels of a certain sort she had had a great relish. "Realistic works," she had called them—as though all reality were of the sewers. She tried one now—*The Plumber's Wife*—but realistic as it was, she felt a more horrible realism outside of it. Then she tried "work." She rather liked "work"—had she been born a milliner, might have earned an honest living by it. But to-day she could not work.

So she walked up and down, and wondered if perhaps after all there were a hell, and people were walking up and down in it now. I do not think any of them would have gained much by changing with her during those endless hours.

She did not think it prudent to drive, and after all the distance was not great. So when Katàra had gone to dinner Mrs. Calverly slipped out at the back of her bungalow, and cut straight across the parade ground to the Towli Road. To do this she had to pass through that gap in the cactus hedge by which her dead husband had gone. When was that? Many years ago? Last night!

It was thoroughly like Mrs. Calverly that she did not, for all her wretchedness and fear, omit to curl her fringe again before starting. She had noticed with intense annoyance while she was doing this that anxiety was not becoming to her large, blonde style. It had a dingy effect upon her; and lack of sleep and appetite had made her lose colour, leaving her face a uniform tallowy white.

She shuddered as she slipped through that gap, though she tried hard to shut her memory. She

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could not. As she passed the Pillitt bungalow she could hear the doctor laugh ; his laugh had nothing at all grim or funereal in it, but it made her shiver. She should never forget his face when he had gone in with her to her husband's room and they had found him dead. Was it he who had begun to suspect ?

The thought made her quicken her step.

She had been waiting nearly half an hour.

What is there in the world so harassing as waiting for someone who does not come, especially if one by no means wishes to be seen waiting ? And Towli was not a pleasant place for her to wait at.

She waited first by the red monument to the rajah's dog, because it seemed less lonely there than down nearer to the river. But soon, for that very reason, she moved. It was above all things necessary that nothing suspicious should be told of her at present, and she must not be seen thus aimlessly waiting. She would go down near the burning-ghât, and if anyone came she would go boldly right to it. They would say she had come to weep unnoticed at the place of her husband's cremation. She wished she had thought of bringing flowers.

Had something prevented him from coming, after all ? What should she do if he did not come, and she had to remain still in ignorance of his warning ? Two natives passed along the road, and lest they should see her she stole with silent tread into the dark shadow of the temple—the ranee's temple—though she had a great reluctance to go thus into the darkness. An irresistible fascination made her peer down the river banks to that spot whereon her husband's body had been burned. The river flowed silver-white in the moonlight that

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flooded all the temple cupolas and minars with its cold sad radiance. A dark heap lay still by the river where he had been burned, shapeless and indistinguishable—a heap as of *débris*. A sudden chill crept over her, and for the moment she forgot her impatience for the man she was awaiting, forgot even her terror of what he might have to tell, in a sudden overpowering superstitious fear and dread.

And the heap moved, and from its shapeless mass a shape well known arose, but swathed in white, that gleamed ghostly in the moonlight. For a moment he stood still, drawing the white cloths from his face. And then with face uplifted to the moon he came swiftly towards her.

In his attitude last night there had been only unspeakable sadness ; on his face now she read an inexorable anger.

With a low cry of terror she turned to fly. Immediately behind her was the doorway into the ranee's temple, and a flight of stone steps leading up from it. Up these she sped, her heart in her mouth. A ghastly race—the living fleeing from the dead.

At the top of the stairs opened one of the courtyards of the temple, but it was cloistered, and she could not cross it directly ; she would have to run round two sides—either to left or right. She took the right, and her pursuer took the left. Which would first reach the wide doorway and second staircase leading to the great court of the temple ?

Her breath came fast in short sobbing gasps ; she could not hear her pursuer, but she knew that he would make no sound, and even she made hardly any on the deeply-sanded pavement.

She turned to glance over her shoulder, not stopping in her flight, and here was a dark place in

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the cloister. Then she tripped, tripped and fell heavily over something laid across her path. But for it she would have hurt herself, falling thus violently upon the flagged pavement. What was it? Something large, and not hard. With ineffable loathing she lifted herself from it, but found her dress had caught, and as she struggled passionately to free herself she dragged it a foot or so into a square of moonlight. At her feet he lay, his face now bathed in the pale sad light of the upbraiding moon. The anger had faded from it. The eyes were closed fast in that unwakening, dreamless sleep, and the nose looked unnaturally sharp and drawn. It was like the face of one who had died of pneumonia: worn out, and eloquent of a measureless weariness, an ineffable sadness.

If she feared the eyes would open and pierce her with their cold upbraiding, or the lips move and curse her, they did not. Unheeding of her, the dead man slept on, and stirred not. No knowledge of her nearness disturbed his rest, in no nightmare did she come to horrify him. An impulse to touch him mastered her—an impulse that was no part of her will, but contrary to it. She had not touched him since his death.

She laid her hand upon his forehead. It was dead cold, and a chill moisture lay on it. At her touch the head fell slightly to the left, and to her it had the effect as of a petulant sleeping child, who, in impatience, turns his face to the wall when one touches him.

CHAPTER XIX.

10.45 P.M.

It had been guest night, but Jim-Jams did not remain at the mess much after half-past ten. There had only been three guests, and none of them had been friends of his. A few weeks ago he would not have needed the presence of guests as an inducement to sit on, but latterly he had not troubled anybody much with his company. It had been supposed that he was secretly solacing the widowed hours of Mrs. Calverly.

It has already been explained why Captain the Hon. U. FitzU. de Tracey was called Jim-Jams, and to you that may all seem simply ludicrous. It was not at all ludicrous to him. When æsthetically-tinted beasts without any legs, but a head at each end, peer at you out of the corners, and reptiles like lizards, only about the size of a camel, and humped like a Brahmin cow, with five horns and one long bare leg, come and sit by you in bed, and laugh hoarsely, or when featherless birds with heads like ex-Prime Ministers choose to sit and choke upon the towel-rail, then it does not seem to you so very funny to be——

What on earth was that ?

Poor Jim-Jams was walking down the road, and the road had until now been for some few yards in shadow ; before it had been so no one was in front of him. But as soon as he had passed out of the

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moonlight under the trees he heard footsteps half a dozen paces ahead.

“Is that you, Menzies?” How could it be? He had left Menzies seated on the billiard-table, and playing a break-down. The step was light and firm; he seemed to know it—to have known it somewhere. Who could it be?

It kept an even distance from him, and now they came to the gateway into Menzies’ and Jim-Jams’ own compound. The road kept straight on, and was still dark for a dozen yards. The drive up to their door struck off at right angles and was moonlit.

Very quietly the man in front pushed open the gate, slipped through, and let it bang to behind him, and passed into the moonlight.

Jim-Jams was standing frozen to the earth in the midst of a tropic night, his eyes glued to the incredible shape in front. As truly as the ground was rocking under his feet that was the Colonel. The dead man was walking neither fast nor slow, but with a measured promptness. He was in an old, well-remembered khaki suit, and his head was a little bent. Presently he stopped and seemed to listen as though he had noted the cessation of the other footsteps behind him. Then he turned and beckoned, and the clear white light of the moon fell broad upon his face. Sad and cold and stern was the expression of the face turned thus to the young man, to whom, as he himself had said, the dead man had been “awfully decent.” There was no doubt he was waiting. But the luckless Jim-Jams had less power than he had will to go to him.

With a sudden very swift recollection, it came back to the young man’s mind that he owed that dead man a hundred rupees. He had borrowed them the day he went on leave, to get out of the way of the baby.

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Until now they had been totally forgotten. But living or dead, he knew that that man had far more totally forgotten them. Living or dead, Colonel Calverly would never have remembered a debt due to him. Again the dead man beckoned, and then with a strangely pathetic gesture of disappointment he turned and passed out of sight in the shadow of the house.

The Seedee boy who had delivered that first note from Mrs. Calverly was lighting a lamp in the bungalow, and Jim-Jams made haste indoors. He was glad to be where there was light and the presence of the living.

"Menghis Sahib send me for book," said the boy. He described the book, which proved to be one that Jim-Jams had been reading lying on his bed that afternoon.

"All right, I'll get it," and Jim-Jams went into his bedroom to fetch it. There was no wooden door between his room and their common sitting-room, only a wide arched doorway and a thick curtain. Coming out of the brightly-lit room, his own seemed for a moment very dark, but he could see the light, yellowish book half-covered by some clothes gleam pale on the rezai. He stretched out his hand to pick it up, and found his fingers close together on the cold forehead of a dead face.

CHAPTER XX.

11.30 P.M.

“HULLOA, Jim, what’s up?”

Captain Menzies was walking home, and Captain de Tracey seemed to have come to meet him. Such devotion was not ordinary.

“Up! Nothing’s up. I was strolling about and heard you coming.”

“Oh, ah!”

Then they walked together in silence. If Captain Menzies had known how passionately his coming had been longed for, I think he must have been flattered.

As it was he did not, and he wondered indolently whether Jim-Jams had been seeing things. He had indeed! But not such things as Captain Menzies supposed. When they got indoors he sat down to write a letter, and Captain de Tracey began to smoke. Captain Menzies wrote his letters with a quill pen, and one could almost hear what he was saying: “Squiggle, squiggle, squiggle, squack, squack . . .” with occasional pauses for thought. After he had been writing some time, one of these pauses became very long, and an odd exclamation came from him. Jim-Jams turned to look. Menzies was half standing up, leaning forward on the writing-table and looking out across the compound towards the church. Presently he sat down, and resolutely the pen began to squeak once more. He finished his letter, folded

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and addressed it, and then got up. Jim-Jams looked narrowly at his face.

"So *you've* seen him," he said calmly.

It may be supposed that Captain de Tracey spoke thus with a certain triumph. How about people "seeing things"? But he did not. There was no triumph at all in his voice, only a kind of dogged desperation.

As for Captain Menzies, he made no verbal response, but he picked up his banjo and played a false chord on it. Had Jim-Jams known anything about harmonies, he would have perceived that his friend must be considerably upset.

Captain de Tracey pulled the cheroot out of his mouth and stared at the ash end of it.

"What do you suppose he's come for?"

"Come for?"

"Yes; don't they generally come for something?"

Captain Menzies tried another chord; but it was quite inadmissible.

"Oh!" he said, "so you think it's genuine?"

"I think that's genuine," observed Jim-Jams with some spirit. "Look!"

They were both standing up, Menzies with his back, he with his face to the window facing the church. Captain Menzies turned round; forty paces from them, with his face turned to the moon, stood the Colonel, and his expression was so vindictive and so dark that it affected them with singular unpleasantness.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WITCHING HOUR.

“ COME on ! ”

The clock in the church turret was striking midnight, but neither Menzies nor de Tracey noticed it. They were standing in the black shadow of the bungalow, and the Colonel still stood immovable in the light of a moon that was nearly full with that satanic expression on his face. Jim-Jams shivered. “ If that ’s the Colonel, he ’s in hell,” he thought.

“ Come on ! ”

At the gate they looked down the road—there was no one on it ; up it towards the mess—there all was for some way in deep shadow. But there were footsteps.

Fifty yards or so up the road, that to the church, turned off, and they found it in bright light. Far down it close to the church gate was the figure they were following. They walked quickly and in silence ; at the church gate Captain Menzies took the lead, and to the surprise of his companion pulled out a revolver. Turning the corner of the church, they strode across the grass to the corner in which lay the Colonel’s official but empty grave. Him they had followed they found, as Menzies at least had expected, sitting upon it, with his face upturned to the cloudless queen of night.

A few paces from him they stood still, and for a brief space both young men gazed full on the sad

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face they had known so well. That expression of cruel malignity had faded, and in its place there was left an unspeakable weariness and ineffable sorrow. What expression might be in the eyes they could not tell, for they were closed. Presently Captain Menzies spoke, and at his words Jim-Jams started.

"Now, Mr. Hewson, of the Katàra Treasury," he said in a low but very firm voice, "I must ask you to get up."

He paused a moment, but there came no response. To Jim-Jams it seemed that the faintest flicker of a smile quivered on the face; but that may have been the shadow of a leaf that fell upon it.

"I have asked you to get up," continued Captain Menzies, "and if you would kindly open your eyes I think you would recognise that I hold a very powerful argument."

He spoke in the same soft tone of quiet sarcasm, but the gibe fell on deaf ears, and there came neither obedience nor reply.

The revolver clicked. Did the eyelids quiver? Or was it the cheating light? At least there came no voice. A very small tree grew close beside the grave; with one hand Colonel Calverly's wraith or impersonator held it. At that hand Captain Menzies took deliberate aim. Poor Jim-Jams shivered.

"Don't!" he said; "Menzies, it's brutal."

"I have warned him," he said sternly.

"But perhaps——"

"If it is a ghost I cannot hurt him," he insisted, and he fired. There was hardly any detonation and no smoke. And hardly any effect followed, but that effect was ghastlier than if it had been greater.

The shot passed clean through the fleshy part of the hand, and the hand fell from the place it had

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occupied ; and the dead man's head fell back and he lay prone upon his own grave. No blood came from the wound, but a clear yellowish fluid began slowly to ooze from it.

To Jim-Jams' fancy it seemed as though the blue lips bore now a faint smile of placid scorn ; but Menzies noticed nothing of the kind.

"Good Lord !" he muttered, "this beats me, unless——" He stooped down and peered closer into the dead face. "*It is the Colonel,*" he said ; "by George, this is awful !"

"I wish you hadn't shot him," said Jim-Jams miserably.

To this Menzies made no answer.

"We ought to take him somewhere," he said ; "let's go back to the bungalow and get something to carry him on."

They walked back without a word ; in less than ten minutes they had returned. But the dead Colonel had not awaited their coming. The bark of the little tree beside the grave, grazed by the shot that had pierced the dead man's hand, was the only proof of the reality of what had passed.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ WHO IS DEAD ? ”

MRS. CALVERLY was receiving visitors. Habited in the garments of her widowhood, she sat in her drawing-room and heard the condolences of her friends. She was not “ in looks,” and it was generally felt that she must have suffered a good deal more from her husband’s death than would have been thought probable. It was easy to see that there was no studied negligence of attire, no well-kept-up air of interesting melancholy. On the contrary, her toilet had been made with obvious and immense solicitude : and her effort appeared to be all for composure and ease of manner. But a haggard look had come into her eyes, and dark shadows lay under them ; her pallor was extreme and unbecoming, and she was perceptibly thinner. More than once she would involuntarily put up her hand to her side, especially at any sudden sound.

Shortly before dusk the judge arrived, and almost with him Colonel Jarndyce and his sister. Mrs. Pillitt was already there, and her husband. Major and Mrs. Cadby went out as these latter came in. But the Resident clove to his chair, intending to leave with the Pillitts, who lived next door to him.

Finally Captain de Tracey and Captain Menzies were announced. Some of the visitors strolled out on to the verandah now ; but they all came back with a very peculiar manner. Next door to the

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drawing-room was the late Colonel's room, and its windows also opened into the verandah. Presently Achchi Singh appeared. Not this time to announce anybody. He went close up to his mistress, and in a low voice told her she was wanted in the next room, where someone wanted to speak to her at once. He then turned away immediately and left the room.

With a dull and dread foreboding Mrs. Calverly heard the message ; for one moment her eyes had met those of the servant, and she read there an undisguised triumph and vindictiveness. Again was her hand involuntarily raised to her side, and she trembled visibly as she rose to her feet. An amazement was fallen upon her, and she hardly stammered an apology as she stumbled from the room.

"I think she's ill," said Mrs. Pillitt, whose curiosity was easily excited ; "don't you think, Tom, you had better go after her?"

But Mr. Pillitt was one of those who had been out on the verandah. So was Colonel Jarndyce. They seemed to have a dislike to catching each other's eyes, and kept looking about with an uneasy, sheepish manner.

"Indeed, I think you're right, Mrs. Pillitt," said Miss Jarndyce ; "I'm sure Mrs. Calverly looked very faint."

Achchi Singh again appeared. He said they were all wanted in the next room ; with many odd glances at one another, and not without whispering, they obeyed.

The Colonel's sitting-room was a large and rather dreary room, scantily furnished and bare of aspect. There was no light in it, and the brief twilight had already begun. But the broad white light of the moon streamed full in through the open window. It was full moon ; exactly twenty-eight days since

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the death of the Colonel. Near the window was the dead man's writing-table, and a shabby black-wood chair was set in front of it. A black-wood settee covered with a leopard-skin rug stood in the middle of the floor. Into this Mrs. Calverly sank as her many visitors crowded by door and window into the room. But in the chair by his writing-table sat the dead Colonel.

"Look!" said Achchi Singh, and with his thin brown hand he pointed at the living and the dead.

"Good God!" said the judge, drawing back nervously, and the Resident and Colonel Jarndyce shuddered as they looked. As for Jim-Jams, his eyes were set in a dull stare as of one unconcerned and scarcely interested in that which was to take place.

"Master Sahib!" whispered Achchi Singh; and it was remarkable to note the tenderness of his voice, so strangely contrasted with the malignity of his glance as it fell on his master's wife.

"Master Sahib!"

But there came no breath of answer, no lifting of the sealed eyelids.

"Master Sahib!" and Achchi Singh crept close to the dead man and passed his hand within the breast of the old khaki tunic. For a few seconds he left it there, and then drew it forth. Rising to his feet, he stood back and pointed once again, but in silence, at the living and the dead. A quiver, slight but unmistakable, fluttered on the dead face; a strong shudder passed from head to feet of the dead body, and a thin red ooze came from a little wound in the dead hand that lay upon the table.

"Master! Master Sahib!" cried Achchi Singh, in low breathless tones of passionate eagerness. Even in that cold light they saw the pallor flush into the

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red bronze of life ; the lips softly parted, and between them crept a long sigh of extremest weariness. Again the lips quivered, and the eyelids, and then from their cavernous hollows the keen blue eyes looked out.

A kind of shiver shook the Colonel's frame, as when one who has dozed awakes and finds that he is chilled. But the dazed stupidity of sleep was still upon him. He stared, but his eyes seemed to notice nothing, and though his lips moved no words of articulate speech came from them.

" Look, sahibs ! " said Achchi Singh, and his voice had a fierce eagerness that was all the stronger for its obvious repression. He spoke in a low clear voice that was very plainly audible to all. " For one moon I, Achchi Singh, have let him sleep. And now I wake him . . . O my dear Master Sahib ! When he grew sick, I watched him, and I saw that he would not die. But the Mem-Sahib, she nurse him, and the more she nurse him, the more he not get well. So I watch, and not say anything, only I watch all the time. . . . And sometimes I give him the medicine, but mostly the Mem-Sahib give it. And I see her put it in chota, chota drop of water, out of chota green bottles ; but when she think me watch no put in drops out of chota bottles. . . . So I, Achchi Singh, in the night stole bottles and took it swiftly to Bal Krishna, at the Lâl Temple by the palace ; he very wise man and very old ; more old than the rajah's grandmother, and he know everything. . . . Yes, sahibs, it was poison-drink, but Bal Krishna very wise man. He burn the poison drink and fill the chota bottles with the blood of Ganesh, clear like water same as poison-drink. Then Achchi Singh swiftly went back and put the bottles in his place ; next morning Mem-Sahib give Master

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Sahib his medicine, and put in plenty drops out of green bottle. Then Colonel Sahib die, more quickly than Mem-Sahib thought, and the doctor sahib not understand—not understand at all why Colonel die. But Achchi Singh knew the Colonel Sahib had written about not be buried in a hole like the other sahibs, and Achchi Singh not afraid. Mem-Sahib, too, very glad have husband body burned up all, so doctors not able dig him up and find poison-drink in him inside. But Achchi Singh steal Colonel while everybody in church, and someone help him; then dead native he put in place of Colonel Sahib, all covered with fulkaris and flowers, and dead native taken to Towli and burned up.”

Achchi Singh looked at Menzies and Jim-Jams now, and a certain grim satisfaction seemed to flicker on his face.

“Several people see the Colonel Sahib, and several people see Mr. Hewson, who very like the Colonel; Mr. Hewson they see walking, and Colonel Sahib they see lying still; but they think both two the same! . . . And now it is a full moon since the Colonel Sahib drink the ‘blood of Ganesh’ . . . Ganesh was Devi’s son, but Shiva angry with Devi for have son at all; and with his tulwar he cut off Ganesh head, and the blood, drop, drop, trickley, trickley, on the ground. Then Devi weep and squeal, so Shiva stick his fingers in his ear, but Devi squeal more and more. So Shiva tell her stop, and with tulwar he cut off the head of his elephant and stick it on Ganesh, who came alive again. So the god Ganesh have man-body but head of elephant, and very wise god Ganesh. Where his blood fell a red flower grew up with a white fruit, and where Devi’s tears fell a white flower came with a red fruit. . . . And the juice of that white fruit we call the ‘Blood of Ganesh,’ but the

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juice of the red fruit we call 'Kali's Tears.' . . . Now, Bal Krishna very wise Brahmin, and he know everything. He know that if Colonel Sahib drink chota drops out of Mem-Sahib's green bottles, Colonel Sahib soon die. But if he drink blood of Ganesh he only die for one moon ; and if when the moon done, Achchi Singh give him Kali's tears to drink, Colonel Sahib soon wake. . . ."

All this time the fluttering spirit had been hovering nearer and nearer to the man that had been dead. The sweat and pallor of death had gone, and the wholesome bronze of life had come again ; the dull and drunken languor had slowly cleared from the blue eyes, and now speech came trembling back to her twin thrones. . . .

"Why ! Who is dead ? " he cried.

As one wakes half conscious, yet wholly astonished from sleep, he staggered to his feet and pointed to the deep mourning of his wife.

No one answered, but the Colonel went to her. He tried to raise her up.

"Good God !" he stammered. "It's herself !"

It was true. She, too, had suffered from her father's malady ; and the sables that she had donned for her dead husband she wore in death for her living husband's dead wife.

It was certainly hard on the second in command.



A New Curiosity Shop.

CHAPTER I.

THE old year lay a-dying, and his shivering successor was within an hour of his arrival. He would have a chilly journey, for the Weald of Kent lay deep in snow, and a little bitter wind sobbed and gasped round the chimney-stacks and gables of Frampton Court, so that the naked trees outside, in the desolate park, flung and tossed their black arms wildly up towards the high, cold heavens, where the moon rode clear and white and sad. It had been a bad year for many in all this great round world of ours, a merry, prosperous year for others ; but such as it was, good or bad, it was done with. It only had about fifty minutes to do any further mischief in ; and yet those were to prove long enough for the ruin of Marston Street. Old Jabez Street lay dying, like the year, and he tossed and turned uneasily on his fine bed, for his ears and mind were full of the Voices of the Night. Upbraidings, calm but insistent reproaches, breathed themselves into the dying ears, and would not be ignored.

“ Has the carriage gone to meet the train yet ? ” he suddenly asks, leaning up, with terrible difficulty, on his quaking elbow.

The attendant comes forward gently with admirable quietness and respectful solicitude.

"The carriage started nearly half an hour ago, sir. It went direct from the stables, so as not to disturb you by coming to the front. Is the pain easier, sir?"

The old man growled what might have been an assent or a denial, and turned away as though to close the conversation.

The attendant went back to the arm-chair by the fire.

Presently one of the doctors came in. Two slept in the house, but twenty could not prevent the millionaire from starting on his journey, from going out into the wild wintry night to keep his tryst with the inexorable King that we shuddering creatures christen Death.

"Any easier?" inquires the physician, softly taking the withered hand and pressing the feeble, vacillating pulse.

The old man shakes his head impatiently.

"It's never very easy dying," he snaps, "as you'll find when your time comes. It's as bad for me as for others."

"Trenchant to the last!" declares the doctor, appealing, as it would seem, to the heavy canopy of damask over the patient's head.

To this the old man vouchsafes no retort.

"What o'clock is it?" he demands presently.

The physician consults a very resplendent presentation watch, and announces that it wants twenty-nine minutes of midnight.

"And the train's due at Horley at eleven twenty-five. They ought to be here in half an hour."

He spoke more to himself than to the doctor, and again turned to the wall.

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The doctor nodded and smiled to the attendant, nodded and smiled as though there were something specially sweet and noble in the old man's doing this, and left the room on tiptoe.

He found his chief, Sir Junket Paine, fallen into a light doze.

"Our dear friend," he whispered, having jogged the great man awake, "our dear friend is as easy as can be expected."

Sir Junket Paine tried to combine in his expression his professional interest in a patient who was reputed to have amassed a fortune of a million and a half, and his recollection that it was usually in the ante-chambers of dukes and princes that he awaited "the end."

"He keeps asking for the son," continued the junior. "He seems very impatient to see him."

"He has got on without seeing him for more than twenty years," remarks Sir Junket. "They have never met since the son's marriage. The old fellow expected him to marry a title, and he married for love—a young person of much their own rank."

"Mr. Street began in a very small way, I suppose?" inquired the junior, who thought Sir Junket looked as if he wanted to tell the story.

"He was a bargeman. But he was wonderfully clever, and plucky and industrious, and, above all, fortunate. He had the true trade instincts, always knowing what to buy and where to sell. And his larger investments were unprecedentedly lucky. He doubled his capital in five months over the American War. He is worth at least a million and a half now."

"And only one child!"

Sir Junket shook his head.

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"To whom he has not spoken for nearly quarter of a century."

"But he has sent for him now," urged the junior.

"Certainly. Oh, quite so; but he has not commanded the presence of a lawyer: there is no sign of his intending to revoke any unfavourable will, and it is known that there is something of the kind."

The two doctors sighed. They had a pleasant, comfortable sympathy for the only son of the millionaire.

The gentlemen had dined well, and found Mr. Street's port undeniable. It was sleepy work, waiting and doing nothing. Presently they were both dozing. But the dying man could not sleep. With muttered peevish ejaculations of impatience he tossed and twisted in his bed, and listened for the sound of carriage wheels. He wanted to set right a great and cruel injustice. Would there be time?

Again he suddenly raises himself, but with still greater difficulty, on to his weak and quivering elbow, and peers out of the shadow of the bed to the ever-wakeful attendant.

A slight sound makes the latter turn. In a moment she is by the bed.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" she asks, rearranging a pillow.

But the old man frowns impatiently. Then a thought strikes him.

"Open the door into the next room," he says.

The next room is his private study, where he was used to do his writing, where his writing bureau stood. He peers towards the open door inquisitively. He sees that the room is not in darkness. The attendant has in fact been sleeping there for a night or two.

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How he would like to be there now alone for five, nay, for three minutes.

Far, far away down some distant corridor a door bangs.

"Go, go!" shouts the old man. "Go at once and stop that banging; find out where it is, and stop it instantly."

The nurse looks half doubtful about leaving him, and makes a gesture as if to ring for someone else.

"Go!" shrieks the old man. "If you wait it may bang again, and it will *kill* me. Go, I tell you!"

And so violent was he, so peremptory, that she went.

It was not at all easy to find the door; she was gone five or six minutes. She had scarcely left the room before the dying man dragged himself, with incalculable difficulty and pain, from the soft and warm bed, and staggered towards the inner room.

His legs quaked beneath him, his hands shook and quivered, his head swam, and he thought he would reel and tumble. But somehow he reached the goal of his desires—the splendid Louis XV. cabinet where his most private papers were locked up. He dragged a chair to it, and fumbled for the key that hung around his neck on a thin chain of old-fashioned gold work. As he fitted the key in the lock there came the crushing sound of the gravel beneath the wheels and horses' feet. The carriage from the station had come.

The two wills were easy to find, being in fact tied up together. One was nearly twenty-five years old; it had been executed after the death of his wife. In it everything that he possessed, without reserve, was left to his dear and only child, Marston Street.

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The other was two years more recent. In it all his property, real and personal, was bequeathed to the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt, in trust for twenty years after his own demise ; the money to be allowed during that time to increase by natural process of compound interest, at the end of which period it should, as thus augmented, be applied to the reduction of the National Debt.

Externally the two wills were precisely alike. The old man's eyes were blurred with the gathering gloom of death. He wished, standing on that silent threshold, to undo the mischief planned in the petty spite of health. Close at hand was the red heart of the pleasant, flickering fire. Very, very painfully he tottered towards it, almost falling more than once. But without accident he reached the hearthrug, and was able to clutch the mantel for support with his quavering left hand. With the right he dropped into the throbbing flame the will, which, if undestroyed, would do so much and such hard injustice. Then he turned to regain his room and bed ; it was slower work now, the flickering, feeble lamp of life had been so roughly shaken that it must soon, soon burn out.

Other steps, hurried and nervous, were hastening down the corridor. As the old man reached the door of communication between the two rooms, his son stood in that leading into the corridor. For the first time for three-and-twenty years they looked in one another's faces. The son trembled at the near presence of the cold King Death, who peered so chilly over his father's shoulder.

For a moment the dying man leaned against the door-jamb, steadying himself with his tremulous left hand ; in his right he held out a folded document to his son.

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“ I sent for you,” he stammers, “ to—to give you this ! ” and staggering, he fell forward.

They were his last words. Henceforth he must keep the great silence that is laid upon the lips of all who have been before us in the world, the wise who taught it and the fools who filled it with their babbling folly, the silence that soon or late comes to the kindly tongues who comfort, and the bitter, wounding tongues that make us smart.

They lifted the old man in their arms and laid him in his bed, and gently drew from the dead fingers the paper that they held.

It was his will. In which all he possessed of real or personal property was devised to the Commissioners of the National Debt. *He had burned the wrong one.* How simple a thing is tragedy.

The horses that had brought his son were not yet stabled before the Rider on the Pale Horse had taken him to ride with him out into the wild night ; out into the Unknown Waste that lies beyond our life.

CHAPTER II.

It was only too true that the whole of the late Jabez Street's colossal fortune was lost to his natural heir. By the death of his father Marston Street was only the richer by a thousand pounds, which had belonged to his late mother. This she had herself left to her husband for his life, afterwards it was to go to her son.

"Well," said Marston Street to his wife, "a thousand pounds is better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick."

But the lady did not seem to think such an accident the necessary and only alternative.

"Fifteen hundred thousand would have been even better," she remarked, with some asperity.

"Yes. But then, you know, we never expected him to leave it to me!"

"Not till he sent for you; but why should he have sent for you, if he did not mean to do the right thing by you?"

"Perhaps he did. Perhaps he meant to destroy that will and make a new one. But he had not time."

"He was ill three weeks."

"Yes. But he was a very obstinate, proud man. It was only, as I think, at the last that he thought better of it; only that last day when he sent for me."

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Mrs. Marston Street had her own opinion. She believed the old man had kept his spite to the last, and had deliberately sent for his only son to bring his ill-treatment of him to a climax by thus handing him the will that was to disinherit him. It was of a piece, she declared to herself, with his whole behaviour towards them, and people, she said, do not change their natures on their death-beds.

She did not reason amiss, but she was wrong. Her husband shrank from the plain and apparent explanation of his father's action, and so doing he was right.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Marston Street was not also disinherited of the small legacy that his mother had left him. One afternoon he was coming home from his counting-house when he was overtaken by a gentleman he knew well—a cousin, in fact, of his wife's.

"Hulloa, Street! Awful business this!"

"What business?"

"Why, the Galwegian and Caledonian Bank."

"What's up with it?"

"It has gone smash," remarked Mr. Brand familiarly. "I have just left Harcourt Brown," he continued; "he's all smiles, for he had shares in it and sold out six months ago."

"I've got ten shares in it," observed Marston Street. "It's a bore to lose a thousand pounds. But I only got it—a legacy from my mother—after my father's death four months ago. So after all I shall not miss it much."

"I remember Carry saying you had a thousand under your mother's will," said Mr. Brand, in a low tone; "but you do not mean to say it was invested in that bank?"

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"It was, though. It seemed a goodish thing, too."

"And you never sold the shares?"

"Sold them? No. Why should I sell them? There was no suspicion of this smash up. You're uncommon cautious after the event. And they were regular dividend payers."

Mr. Brand looked straight in front of him, then hailed a hansom. They got into it together. He kept peeping guiltily at his companion out of the corner of his eye.

Presently the latter caught him.

"What is the matter with you, Brand?" he exclaimed irritably. "As I said before, nobody exactly cares to lose a thousand pounds, but though my father did not leave me his fortune, I am not going to break over a thousand."

"Unfortunately," thought the other, "that is precisely what you are going to do. That's the tragedy!" But aloud he said nothing. He had not the moral courage.

At the railway station the boys were crying the evening papers:

"Scotch bank stopped payment, sir! *Evening Herald*, sir! Galwegian and Caledonian Bank stopped payment, sir! Hunlimited Liability, sir!"

"What's that they're calling out?" asked Marston, turning suddenly giddy.

"Unlimited liability, I think," responded Brand, "but perhaps it's a mistake." He found it very hard to say anything. He did not flatter himself that what he did say was very brilliant. His throat felt dry; he wished himself, as he said, at Jericho. How populous a resort that little Oriental city would become if everyone who wished himself

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there, or was wished there by his friends, could be there in reality ! Unlimited Liability ! What a simple thing to say ; what a terrible thing to realise in the results it may imply. By those two little words together Marston Street found himself reduced from affluence to beggary.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Sir Junket Paine discussed the fortunes of Jabez Street with Dr. Urban Bland he fell, like other great men before and since, into some errors concerning which I would like to set the reader right, as regards two of them at any rate.

In saying that Jabez Street had been a bargeman Sir Junket was a generation out, for the bargee was not Jabez but his father, old Hiram Street, who was the first member of his family, as he was apt, at a later period of his life to boast, who had ever worn a collar.

Still Sir Junket was right as to the beginnings of the millionaire having been very obscure.

He was, however, again wrong in giving his colleague to understand that Mrs. Marston Street had also belonged to the bargee class. She was the pretty and almost penniless daughter of a Sussex parson of good family, and about as lacking in the qualities that make up a useful wife as she could have been. Fortunately her husband had already made some way in life at the time his father quarrelled with him for marrying her, and he had risen to partnership in a well-known house. He had since gone on making money, and had lately bought out the son of his late partner, who had no taste for business.

Mrs. Marston Street took her husband's ruin very hardly. It seemed as if she was impressed with the notion that he had done it on purpose, and personally rather enjoyed the process. It was, she realised,

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a most terrible thing for her to be reduced, at her time of life, from affluence to beggary. (Not that Mrs. Street would ever have had the energy to beg for anything.) But she entirely failed to understand that it was quite as terrible for her husband, and not much more agreeable for her children. She wailed persistently, and if reproaches had had any market value, poor Marston might have started a wholesale business of the very largest description.

That he felt he had been foolish in leaving that luckless thousand invested in a concern of unlimited liability did not make these upbraidings any easier to bear. If he had consulted his own convenience, I think the unlucky gentleman would have quietly broken his heart and died ; but he had always been a very unselfish fellow, and he determined to live and work as well as he could, and as long.

If only Mrs. Marston would have taken up the notion of breaking her heart ! But she contented herself with doing all in her power to break those of her family.

About two things the world at once made up its mind. That it had been inexcusable of Marston Street to lose his fortune through neglecting to transfer an investment, and that Francis Jabez Marston Street, his eldest son, would certainly never do anything to restore the ruin.

“ He has never been taught anything except how to be a fine gentleman,” they declared. “ What has he learned at Eton, except to dress himself up to the eyes ? What has he learned at Cambridge, except to spend as much money on ridiculous fads and extravagances as would keep many of us for the whole year ? ”

Some declared he was conceited, “ though it seems almost impossible,” they charitably added.

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“ Why, what on earth has he but his looks ? ”

“ Looks, indeed ? I ’d rather have a downright ugly chap than those sort of namby-pamby good looks.”

It was generally agreed that the younger sons, having all along known they would be expected, as is the way with younger sons in England, to make their own way, would shake down into their fallen fortunes much better.

One gentleman came forward and offered to take Hiram, who was nineteen, into his office at a small salary, an offer that was gladly and gratefully accepted. Another friend, who had a West India branch, gave Phil, who was a year younger, a berth out at St. Kitts. But no one had anything to offer which the young “ swell ” would be any good at.

It need hardly be said that Marston himself had no difficulty in finding a billet ; but it was pathetic to see the elderly man, who had stood so high, starting again up the ladder of life from the lowest rung.

Before the smash Francis Street had lived a good deal in rooms of his own, in one of the smartest parts of the town, for he detested the suburban residence of his family ; and when not actually in London liked to be out of it altogether, and was often abroad “ mooning round the picture galleries,” as his critics scoffingly said.

Of course these rooms were at once given up. But they had been furnished partly by the fittings of Frank’s Cambridge quarters, and partly by furniture, pictures, china, &c., he had picked up since. He was five-and-twenty, and he had had an excellent allowance, had even saved a little each year out of it, a fact which would have surprised his critics. Some people have the art of buying a great deal with

their money. And those who only spend their money and never buy anything cannot understand it.

When the crash came, Frank was at first very much of the opinion of his critics. What could he do? It was by no means lost on him that not one of all their friends had a word of encouragement for him, though his brothers were patted on the back all round. His mother had always failed to understand him, and was annoyed that he had none of the outdoor sporting tastes of her own brothers.

"You may buy a place, Marston," she had often said, "or the old man may relent and leave you Frampton Court after all; but nothing will ever make a squire of Francis. He's finnick!"

Poor Frank! It was well that his gentle, meek little father was kind and tender to him.

"The lad's no fool," began Marston mildly.

"Fool! Why should he be a fool? Goodness knows he takes after you enough in other ways," snapped the lady. "But he's—I'll tell you what he is," she concluded, as if it was quite a new suggestion—"he's finnick!"

Perhaps her husband was not sufficiently instructed to know whether his eldest son was so or not, so he held his peace.

"For my part I can't stand a finnick!" declared the lady, rather pleased with her substantive.

When they moved out of their handsome villa, it was, of course, Mrs. Street who decided where they should go and live, and then what house should be taken.

There was just room in it, as it turned out, for the parents and their younger son (Phil had already sailed for St. Kitts). Marston ventured some remark as to Francis, which his wife snubbed instantly.

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“ Francis never did care to reside at home when home was home indeed,” she observed loftily. “ There is no need to provide room for him now, when ‘ home ’ is a mere exiguous shelter from the weather ! ”

For my part I think Mrs. Marston wallowed in her reverses like a pig in a puddle ; she certainly never lost a chance of smacking, as it were, her lips over them. If she had to be a martyr, she liked to wear her crown over her bonnet, so to speak, while she could enjoy it.

“ But, my dear,” murmured Marston, “ the boy must live somewhere ! ”

“ By all means, my love. And you may be sure he will reside in the best quarter. He always has ! ”

“ Don’t worry about me, dad,” said Frank, when his father, with a very red face, made him understand that there was no provision for his reception at Malabar Cottage. “ To tell the truth, dad,” he continued, “ it fits in better. I have a sort of notion of doing something, but would much rather none of them knew anything about it till I see how it turns out. I don’t think I shall even tell you ! ”

“ Frank, my boy, I feel very much the breakdown of all your hopes.”

“ Dad, don’t talk nonsense ! My hopes are only just beginning. I fancy you have forced me to make my fortune, which otherwise I might have not troubled about. After all, it’s in the family—making fortunes, I mean. You will see that I inherit the family taste. Should you be surprised to hear I intend to start shop-keeping ? ”

“ Shop-keeping ! ”

“ Yes. I dare say you think I shall hate it. My tastes have not hitherto seemed commercial. But

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I shall like it. What is more, I shall succeed at it. I can't run to a barge," he added, with a laugh, "or I would try and build the family fortunes afresh from the start."

The allusion to the barge would have infuriated his mother, though she, of course, was not "finnicky."

"His present Grace of Lulworth," the young man went on, with a grin, "used constantly to remind me at Eton, during his first term, before he had the nonsense knocked out of him, of my bargee ancestor. I blacked his eye once, and I do not think he was a bit grateful to me for it. He was only called Algy Beaudesert then, for the late Duke was, as you know, only his uncle."

Marston Street smiled. He liked a quiet chat with his son, who, as we have seen, he believed not to be a fool.

"But, my dear Frank, how are you going to stock a shop? It wants a lot of capital."

"Ah, I suppose it might. All the same, I am going to stock one. Will you come and have tea with me behind my counter the first Sunday?"

"If you intend to keep your establishment open on Sundays, I presume you are going to be a tobacconist."

"No, I'm not; nor a stale fruiterer either. In fact, my shop will not be open to the public on Sunday, only to you. That will be my 'at home' day. Mind you come."

"You have not told me the address yet."

"No. Do not be so dreadfully inquisitive, dad. I shall tell you in good time. But, mind, the information is for yourself only. I do not propose to tell the family."

The father promised, and went his way, smiling

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quietly. He was thinking that, to his mind, Frank did not seem altogether "finnicky."

"I'm sure," he told himself, "none of us have been pluckier about our ruin than Francis. It means to him the loss of every friend, of every hope and expectation of his life. And he has never once groaned or grumbled."

CHAPTER IV.

It is probable that Marston Street hardly took his son literally when he stated his intention of keeping a shop, but it was, nevertheless, true that the young man did seriously propose a venture in that direction.

“ Poor dad ! ” the young man thought to himself, as he watched his father, from the window, slowly cross to the shady side of the street. “ He feels it much worse than our mother, though he says so much less. It has broken him. He is very brave, but he has finished his life.”

The young man turned back into the room with a lump rising in his throat, and a suspicious dimness about the eyes. Like thousands of us, he was a much better fellow than people ever thought. Underneath the rather artificial, fine-gentleman manner there was an honest, wholesome heart, and plucky, manly self-reliance. Only hitherto there had, he thought, been really no necessity to rely upon himself. Francis Street was the great-grandson of a bargeman, and he had blacked the ducal eye of his schoolfellow for thinking it necessary to remind him of the fact, but the young man was a gentleman, not in mere tastes and training only, but in every thought of his mind.

There was something about his father that always touched him, a sort of appealing deprecation of criticism. His father having so nearly succeeded, had so utterly failed. And what, thought the son, is so wholly pathetic as failure ?

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Poor Marston Street had failed to secure his natural inheritance ; he had lost it to secure, as he fancied, a wife worth all else that the world could offer. And how he had failed there ! He had made a fortune, and had failed to keep it.

And he was such a harmless creature ! Gentle, sweet-tempered, without a rancorous thought for anyone.

Francis glanced round his room ; he had the rooms till the last day of June, so he had stayed on in them, for there would be no economy in moving out. But this was his last day in them. And now he looked round on the beautiful and interesting things he had collected, with so great interest and pleasure, in such various places.

" Please, sir," remarked the landlord of the rooms, who had once been a butler in his father's service, throwing wide the door, " Lord Hounslow wants to see you. I told him ' Not at 'ome,' and he only laughed. He said he saw you just now at the winder. He begs as you 'll let him come up."

" Very well, Perkisett," and the man went down much pleased. He had a feeling that it was almost profane to turn away the eldest son of a Marquess, and a Marquess who would certainly be made a Duke at the next change of ministry.

Hitherto Frank had rigorously refused himself to everybody.

" It will have to come," he had told himself ; " all that life will have to be dropped, and it will be easier to do it now than later. It's all part of one thing now. Later on it would seem like a fresh misfortune."

He was rather touched by Lord Hounslow's coming and persistence. They were only fairly good friends. But he had always thought the young man nice.

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Perkisett announced "The Hurl of 'Ounslow" with a rolling emphasis that suggested the deliberate tasting of port wine.

Lord Hounslow made no mistakes. He came forward exactly as if nothing had happened since their last meeting. There was no irritating air of compassionate patronage. Still he was perfectly direct.

"Of course we've heard of your worry," he said, sitting down leisurely, as if he meant to remain, and drawing out his cigarette-case. "It does seem outrageous—that Unlimited Liability business. I am not going to bother you about your plans; I expect it's not easy to make up your mind all in a hurry about them. But my father asked me, if I should succeed in catching you, whether you would come and stay with us for a bit. Perkinsett tells me he's losing you."

"Of course," replied Frank. "You see, I have really no income at all now. I happened to have saved a hundred or two out of my allowance."

"Saved!" cried the visitor. "In all my days you're the first chap I ever heard say that. And you always seemed pretty extravagant too," he added, with a glance at the opulent surroundings.

Frank laughed.

"Well, my father did give me a ripping screw. And, you see, I was always buying things. Half the fellows one knows only spend and never buy. So everyone thought me extravagant, when I really was saving up."

"Saving up!" ejaculated Lord Hounslow, with another glance at the china and pictures and furniture.

"Certainly. I've got it all. It was bought with money that was my own, and there is no claim, either legal or moral, against all this. It is really mine."

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“ Yes. Of course. But I fancy the dollars would be more to the point now.”

“ I do not know. I knew what to buy, and what to give for what I did buy. I think these things are worth a heap more now than when I bought them. I think I will tell you something that was to have been a dark and mysterious secret. I am going to keep a shop.”

“ Oh, nonsense ! ” exclaimed Lord Hounslow. “ By the way, we ’ve wandered from the point. My father wants you to come and stay with us. We are leaving town to-morrow, the rest of the season (it will only be a couple of weeks, they say) we shall stop at Hounslow, and my father will drive backwards and forwards. The doctors don’t want him to stick in London any longer. Will you come with us ? Father thinks, if you and he have a talk, he may be of some use to you.”

“ It is very kind indeed of him to think of me ; and, of course, I should enjoy it. But, my dear Hounslow, enjoyment is scarcely to be my object in life yet awhile. And I think I must just say ‘ No ’ straight.”

“ Ah, but this is not merely a pleasure visit. If you talk things over with the governor, it may do some practical good. He thinks he might get you a private secretaryship.”

Frank was more upset by this eager friendliness than he had been by all his misfortunes. He could scarcely command his voice to reply. But all the same, he was firm.

“ Hounslow,” he said, “ I really do not know how to thank you for this friendliness. But I think my own idea is better. I have, as I told you, a hundred or two ; but I have no *income* whatever. Secretaryships are so much sought after nowadays for the sake of the introduction to political life, or diplomatic life,

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and so on, that they are generally unpaid for some time. I have to *make money*."

"If my father decided to offer you his own secretaryship, he would know about your circumstances, and would, of course, pay."

Frank shook his head.

"No," he said, "that would not do. It would be to suit me, not to suit himself, and I should hate it. Why pay for what you can easily get free?"

"Sometimes one gets a better article by paying for it."

"Yes. Often. But I do not know that I should be a good article. I do not feel at all sure that I should make a good private secretary. The list of things he is supposed to know, and do (in *The Caxtons* I think it is) always terrified me. No, I had better stick to my shop."

"Your shop?"

"Yes. I told you I intended starting a shop, and I do. It was not a little joke. After all, it is only a Recrudescence of Family Tradition. As you are doubtless aware, my great-grandfather was a bargee."

Lord Hounslow laughed.

"So I've heard. I remember you leathered Algy Beaudesert at Eton for saying so, though."

"Certainly. It was horrid cheek his saying so. All the same it was true, only I think he said it was my grandfather. Well, I am going in for trade again. That's my line, I fancy. But navigation isn't, so I am obliged to forsake the traditional line and strike out a new one."

"Of course you're inventing," observed the hope of the house of Mortlake.

"No, I'm not. But my original idea was to keep it as dark as possible. That I already see was a mistake. A shop like mine wants advertising among

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the higher classes. So I tell you, 'soliciting the favour of your patronage and recommendation.' "

"What sort of shop are you going in for, anyway?"

"A curiosity shop."

"Ah! We now begin to smell daylight. Your stock-in-trade I see before me, is it not?"

Frank laughed at his friend's English, and admitted the correctness of his surmise.

"I wish," cried Lord Hounslow, "you'd take a partner. I should wallow in it. You should interview all the old lady customers and I would interview—well—all the *new* ones!"

Frank laughed, but did not at once close with his friend's offer.

"'Lord Hounslow, Jokes & Co.' would, of course, sound very well," he admitted, "but at present 'Jokes & Co.' has no partner. I must make my business first, then develop it."

"Is 'Jokes & Co.' the title of your firm?"

Frank nodded.

"Sounds cheery anyway," said Lord Hounslow.

"Would you like to come and see the premises?"

"*Ra-ther!*" replied this painfully vernacular young man. "Get your chap to call a hansom."

"Hansom! Nonsense. If you come you'll have to come in a green bus."

"Forgive my saying," laughed Lord Hounslow, "that *Time is Money*. A sentiment all my own, and hot out of the oven. In business *Time is Everything*."

The window stood open. Outside was a small balcony. Lord Hounslow stepped out, and blew a silver whistle shrilly. Twenty seconds later a hansom was at the door.

CHAPTER V.

“ How did you find it ? ”

“ By accident,” replied Frank. “ Doesn’t it look promising ? ”

“ *De la première classe !* Is it dear ? ”

“ No. And, you see, mine is much the bigger half.”

The shop was a double one. Half was used as a post office ; but, as Mr. Street observed, his was the better half.

“ I ’ve got it for three months, with option then to take on for a year. At the back is a small parlour, but that the tenant keeps (I ’m *sub-tenant*), viz. the old lady who has the post office.”

“ She doesn’t look so *very* old ! ” remarked Lord Hounslow.

Street laughed.

“ Oh, the girl you saw downstairs ! That ’s her great-niece. Miss Priddy was not there. I expect she is playing *shut-eye* in the parlour we spoke of.”

(“ Charming game,” observed Lord Hounslow. “ I play it splendidly myself.”)

The latter remarks were not made in the shop, but upstairs, where Frank had two good rooms and a sort of scullery, or housemaid’s closet ; the rest of the house belonged to Miss Priddy and a lodger.

“ In these upstairs rooms, of course, I shall live,” Frank explained. “ They will also be my warehouse, for, needless to say, the little shop won’t hold a tithe of my things.”

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“ And when they ’re *all* sold ? What then ? ”

“ I intend to buy as well as sell. I have my own ideas as to that. . . . I am always, as it is, getting offers of bric-à-brac, pictures, &c., that people want to sell to me. I shall get many more when I sell them.”

“ I *do* wish,” murmured Lord Hounslow plaintively, “ you ’d take me as a partner—sleeping partner even. I ’m unsurpassed in that line.”

But Frank was obdurate. There must be no partner till there was a business to share.

“ There ’s one thing,” declared Lord Hounslow, “ that I *insist* on, so it ’s no use your being pig-headed about this. All your things have to be moved from Jermyn Street here. I ’m going to move them ! ”

“ You ! ”

“ Yes, *me* ! ” reiterated the ungrammatical young man. “ My father has a lot of big covered wagons like carriers’ carts, wherein we send our produce to Covent Garden Market—for we too are shopkeepers, only we haven’t exactly got a shop, and we ’re in the greengrocery and dairy-produce line. To-morrow morning, after emptying themselves of the cabbages and things, these will call at Jermyn Street and bring all your stock here. I ’ll superintend.”

And this good-natured young man did, thereby saving Frank a very considerable expense.

The shop was well stocked, and the rest of the things were taken upstairs to be brought down as required, and meanwhile to furnish Frank’s living-rooms.

Miss Priddy watched the arrival of the wagons with devouring interest, but she was not permitted to see the shop itself till all was arranged. Between the post office and the shop Frank had had a screen

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erected, the lower half of wood, the upper of glass. But a long curtain could be drawn across the latter, which was done now, and only when all the quaint and pretty things were in place did Frank allow them to be seen.

By luncheon time all was in order, for they had been at work since six o'clock in the morning, so that Lord Hounslow said he had never sat up quite so late before! Then the two young men had luncheon upstairs, their meal consisting of a veal and ham pie and some fruit. But in the midst of it came an interruption.

CHAPTER VI.

THE interruption was a customer.

They had bolted the shop-door on the inside when they went upstairs to lunch, but Miss Priddy, breathless with excitement, came up the private stairs to tell them "a grand lady in a carriage and pair wanted to get into the shop to buy a *vause*."

"She might see for herself," said Lord Hounslow, "that there's really no room in the shop for a carriage and pair. I doubt if it would conveniently hold a four-wheeler. She must be an unreasonable female."

"Female, indeed!" cried Miss Priddy, much scandalised. "You should see her rings!"

Miss Priddy had no notion that he was a lord.

"Meanwhile," said Frank, "my first customer is waiting." So he left Lord Hounslow and Miss Priddy to fight it out, and without delay went down to the shop.

He bowed very respectfully as he admitted the lady and apologised for having kept her waiting.

"... I only moved in this morning," he explained, "and the stock has not been arranged many minutes. I did not venture to hope for so early a customer."

"Perhaps I shall not be a customer," said Miss Priddy's female. "But I want to inquire about that bowl. I saw it through the glass screen from the post office. I had come to send a telegram."

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Frank placed the bowl in her hands, and she turned it about with undisguised admiration.

"Is it *very* dear?" she inquired.

"No, madam. At the price for which I would sell it to you it would not be *dear*. But the price is a high one. I ask thirty guineas for it."

The lady said nothing, but continued to twist the bowl about.

"I saw a similar bowl, but not nearly so fine as this, in a Bond Street shop priced forty guineas last week," observed Frank.

"I bought it," said the lady quietly. "It was, as you say, not nearly so fine as this. It has a crack all across the back too. Yet I am told it was a bargain. I will certainly give you thirty guineas for yours. I will take it with me, I have a carriage here."

Frank began to wrap the bowl carefully in paper. The lady moved about.

"What price do you ask for this figure?" she inquired, touching a beautiful Chelsea statuette of Shakespeare.

"If I sold it without its companion, madam, the price would be sixty guineas. For the pair I would take one hundred pounds."

"They are very fine," said the lady. "Your things are very cheap. I will buy the two figures. But I have not enough to pay for all three in my pocket. I have enough to pay for the bowl; but you must put the figures aside for me. I will return for them after luncheon."

"Please take them, madam. Send me your cheque by post. I would rather you took them if you would not mind."

But the lady requested instead that the things might be sent to her later in the day.

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"I am Lady Salford," and she handed him a card. "I live quite near."

This did not surprise Frank at all, for, rather slummy as his own street was, it lay, as often happens in London, cheek by jowl with one of the smartest squares in Belgravia.

When his customer was gone Lord Hounslow came down, having been strictly forbidden to come into the shop before.

"Did the female buy anything?" he inquired eagerly.

"She bought a bowl and two figures for one hundred and thirty-one pounds ten shillings," replied Frank.

"Oh, my aunt!" cried Lord Hounslow. "Are you *sure* you don't want a partner?"

They both laughed.

"Nothing seems to be gone, either. Now, one would have missed that sideboard."

"But it would not have fetched so much. All the same, the things were cheap."

Frank told his friend about the bowl. "... the figures would fetch perhaps as much again in a season-sale at Christie's," he added.

"I'll step round to Salford House," said Hounslow, "and explain that the price was really two hundred guineas."

Again they laughed.

"All the same," said Frank, "I did well enough, for I did not give sixty for the three. They were some of my bargains. Besides, when I picked them up that sort of thing wasn't so much sought after."

Lady Salford was a well-known figure in the world to both young men. She was not exactly a beauty, but she had the much rarer gift of charm, which some people say is nearly obsolete. Her story was

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a little romantic, for at twenty-four she was a widow as well as being one of the richest women in London. But that story, if it has to be told, shall be told separately. It would take up too much room here.

She was not Frank's only customer on that first day of his shop-keeping, but she was his best. In the course of the afternoon nineteen persons came into the shop, of whom eleven made purchases. Three of the others came to look and handle, and declare that all the articles were very dear. One came in to ask if Frank would give a small subscription to the Royal Society for Preventing Cruelty to Flowers. One wanted to sell him some water-cress, and another to sell him some muffins (also, he guessed, they wanted to have a peep at the pretty things), one asked change of a sovereign, and one inquired the shortest way to Pimlico.

The eleven purchasers chiefly made small purchases, but it was a very good day's work for an opening, in such a business.

Lord Hounslow went away for a couple of hours, but his curiosity was too great for him to keep away altogether, and about six he came back, full of eagerness to hear what business had been done.

"You've sold nothing since!" he complained, with a disappointed glance round.

"Sorry to disagree with you. I have sold thirty-two articles, including a big screen that you *might* have missed. I know you long to know what they fetched. Well, altogether, they fetched forty-one pounds five shillings. Not quite so good as one hundred and thirty-one pounds for three things. But it would not have been a bad day's business even if I had not sold those three."

Lord Hounslow could scarcely tear himself away,

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but he was dining out, and from Frank's shop to the "Haunt of the White Man," as he called it, was some distance.

"Old Gummy St. Roc," he said, thus profanely alluding to a noble Marquess, "is marrying one of his daughters, and I will make him buy her a wedding present here. I know she goes in for these sort of things. Good night, Jokes & Co. If you won't have me for a partner, have me as a *traveller* to take in custom."

Very soon after he had departed Frank's shop-door opened, and an anxious-faced lady entered with a nervous, shamefaced glance around. She had a good expression, and her sad, tired eyes were kindly and refined, but there was an unmistakable air about her of being ill to do in the world and troubled. Nevertheless she was undoubtedly a lady, and Frank felt sure that if misfortunes had overtaken her, they had not been deserved.

He bowed with a grave and quiet respectfulness that seemed to put the poor lady rather more at her ease.

From beneath her cloak she produced a little parcel, and he had no difficulty in guessing that she had come to sell and not to buy.

"I suppose," she said, in a low, shy voice, "that you buy as well as sell."

"Certainly," he answered, with a little laugh. "I have been buying for a long time; I only began to sell to-day."

His cheerful, unaffected manner seemed to relieve the lady of much of her embarrassment.

"I know it is a new shop," she remarked. "I often come to the little post office, and an hour ago I was there and saw that this shop had been opened. Miss Priddy told me that you seemed to have had a

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good deal of custom, considering, even already. So I went home and brought them to show you."

She began, as she spoke, to untie her parcel.

"They are miniatures," she continued, unfolding the paper, "and they are by Cosway."

Now Frank had very often been offered miniatures, and very often had been told that they were by Cosway, but he had very seldom had the refusal of any that were genuine.

"Ah," he said courteously, "genuine Cosways are scarce and valuable."

"There are six. And they are all, as you see, in real old ivory frames, and the name of each is at the back."

The paper was now all unfolded, and the miniatures were lying on the Empire table that seemed the most convenient place for them. In Frank's shop there was no counter. He picked them up one by one, and examined each carefully, but at the first glance his doubts vanished, and he was quite sure they were genuine.

"And you really want to sell them?" he asked.

"Yes. None of them are portraits of any family interest to me. But a member of my family was a collector. Of course, I admire them. They are beautiful. But I would much rather have the money. Indeed, I have no choice——"

She paused, with a faint flush on her pale, tired face.

"They are, I have no doubt at all, perfectly genuine," observed Frank, not seeming to hear her last words or noticing her slight confusion; "and they are very fine. Some quite genuine antique miniatures are not fine at all. These are exquisite, and they are in splendid state. The proper way to sell them would be in a season-sale at Christie's."

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"I should have to wait months for that. No, I cannot wait at all. I would rather sell them now and get a quarter, than wait and sell them after weeks' and months' delay."

"The truth is," he explained, "I could not offer you even a quarter of what you might get at Christie's. They might fetch as much as ninety guineas each there. I could certainly not offer you more than twenty guineas each."

"Would you give me that? Would you give me a hundred and twenty guineas for them?"

The pale flush deepened, and the tired eyes glistened eagerly.

"Certainly I would give you that. But you know it is throwing them away. I could not advise you to sell them for so little."

"So little! I might have offered them half over London and not been offered nearly so much."

She pushed them towards him, as though joyfully willing to part with them.

"Will you, could you—buy them to-day?" she inquired with ill-dissembled suspense.

"Yes—if you really wish it. I must, of course, give you a cheque. I have not got the money in cash in the shop. But if you like to bring them again to-morrow I would pay you in notes and gold."

"Oh, no. The cheque would be best. I would rather finish it all up to-night."

Frank bowed and inquired as to whose order the cheque should be payable to, and was given the name of Margaret Dene, whether Miss or Mrs. he was not told and did not inquire. He withdrew to write the cheque, and soon returned with it in his hand.

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“A hundred and twenty-six pounds. I think that is right.”

“Oh, I had forgotten they were guineas. It is six pounds more than I expected.”

“It is little enough,” he answered, smiling.

The lady smiled too, and with a lighter step and much more cheerful air than at her entry, she bade Frank good night and left the shop.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER he had shut his shop and balanced his accounts, Frank had some supper, a very frugal one ; and after that he went out for a walk, with the parcel for Lady Salford in his hand.

Half an hour later he bent his steps towards Salford House. He knew it very well, for a year ago it had been let furnished for a few months to some great friends of his. He rang the bell, and the big doors were promptly opened by the hall porter.

" Oh, are you the young man from Jokes & Co. ? " he demanded, surveying Frank rather critically.

Frank admitted that he was.

" Well, then, her ladyship's instructions was as she should see you personally."

The young man from Jokes & Co. did not inquire whether it was Lady Salford's ordinary custom to see people impersonally ; but he obeyed the rather imperious gesture by which the hall porter had signified that he was to walk in.

A footman received him, as it were, from the hands of the hall porter, who promptly went back to his hooded wicker-chair, like a dog into its kennel, and the footman led him up the wide, red staircase that he knew so well, to a small ante-room in which he had sometimes waited before.

The whole thing amused Frank hugely. He was not at all depressed by the memory of his former gentility and the contrast of his present mean estate. On the contrary, he was rather elated. It

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was the first day of his life on which he had changed spending money into earning it.

"Please take a seat. Her ladyship has not come up from dinner yet."

Frank obeyed. It was the first time in his life a footman had addressed him without saying "sir." It sounded a little odd, that was all. There was nothing insolent or uncourteous in the man's manner. He was much too good a servant.

As he left the room, Frank fancied he caught him "taking stock" of the young man from Jokes & Co. But that might easily be fancy, or the footman might merely be a little curious as to the contents of the parcel.

Presently the door was thrown open by another footman and Lady Salford entered.

"The young man from Jokes & Co., my lady," the lackey announced.

She smiled a little as she came forward, and the door closed behind her.

"I think you *are* Jokes & Co.," she said.

She looked far more beautiful in her evening dress of black and lilac; and Jokes & Co. admitted instantly to himself that she was the most lovely person he had ever seen. And yet she was not supposed to be at all a beauty. She was generally called the triumph of grace over feature.

"I have no messengers at present," he replied, "my business is in its infancy—it was born, in fact, to-day. We shall have, of course, to get a messenger. At present I must be my own. I have brought the china."

"The reason I asked you to bring them," the lady explained, "was that I would like to ask your opinion as to the genuineness of a Plymouth group that has

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been sent me on approval. It is unmarked, as Plymouth so often is, but I think it is genuine."

She opened an inner door, and led the way into a much larger room.

Jokes & Co. glanced round. He had known the room very well. The furniture was mostly familiar, though a few bits of special interest had been added; but the china, photographs, &c., were not those he had been used to see there.

"Ah, how stupid of me! I forgot to bring it down from my boudoir. I was rather late and dressed in a hurry. I will ring and send for it."

Before the lady had finished speaking, the young man had hastened to save her the trouble and had rung the bell for her.

Now he had scarcely done so before he perceived that he had made a mistake. For the bell, as he had remembered, was in an unusual position behind the *portière* that draped the door.

As his eyes met Lady Salford's he could see that the little episode was not lost upon her.

"How clever of you," she remarked with a little laugh, "to know by instinct that the bell was behind that curtain."

"I am not really very clever, I am afraid," he replied.

She was, he knew, still watching him. He stood, not far inside the door, in such a position as he imagined a man of his supposed class would adopt.

"I wonder," the lady said aloud, "if you were ever in this room before."

"Yes, madam." The young man from Jokes & Co. answered frankly. "Yours is not the first piece of china I have been asked to give my opinion of in this room."

The lady seemed a little puzzled, perhaps a little

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disappointed. It was quite true that Frank had been asked in that very place to pronounce upon a bit of china. And she saw that he spoke the plain truth. But her next remark was to the footman who answered the bell, and whom she sent to her maid for the box containing the Plymouth group.

While he was absent about his errand, a rather awkward pause occurred.

To see the young man standing there doing nothing, "at attention" as it were, embarrassed her somehow, though it scarcely seemed to embarrass him. And yet how could they sit down and wait together, talking as they would have done, had he been what he seemed and not what he chose to wish to seem.

The footman seemed very long.

"Do sit down," she was beginning, when a better idea struck her.

"These Chelsea figures," she said, "are neither so large nor so fine as those I got to-day; but they cost very much more."

Her allusion to them was evidently an invitation to examine them; he moved forward and did so. But not as he would have examined a piece of china in that room twelve months ago. He studiously affected a professional air, and he kept as far from her as possible.

"No, madam," he observed, with a dry manner that was absurdly unlike his own, "they are not so good—not nearly so good as the Milton or Shakespeare you purchased from us."

The "us" struck her ear.

"Have you a partner?" she inquired half carelessly, but watching him all the same. "I thought I caught a glimpse of another—er—gentleman in the inner room."

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"At present, madam," replied the young man in his dry, deferential voice, "I represent the firm."

He did not tell her much.

"The gentleman that I thought might be your partner seemed so very like a gentleman I have often met."

"Indeed, madam?"

"Yes. Young Lord Hounslow."

"*Indeed*, madam?"

"Yes. If you had ever seen Lord Hounslow, you would be as much struck by the likeness as I was." She watched him curiously as she said this.

"Likenesses, madam"—at this point the footman returned—"are very interesting."

Lady Salford felt herself baffled. But she had other arrows in her quiver.

The footman opened the box and drew forth the costly piece of bric-à-brac in its multitudinous wrappings of silver paper. Having unfolded these with as much awe and as little enjoyment as if he had been undressing an important baby, he left the room.

"And now," inquired the lady, "what do you think of it?"

"I could tell, I think, with my eyes shut that this is true Plymouth. There is no other paste at all like it."

Lady Salford watched his long, pointed fingers as they seemed to caress the white china.

"You say the question of likeness is very interesting," she observed. "What do you think of cheirology? Do you think one's hands really tell much?"

"No," he replied, with a light laugh, and forgetting his "madam," "for if cheirology were true, I ought

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to be a duke at least : and my grandfather was the son of a bargeman ! ”

“ Nowadays,” remarked Lady Salford, “ one meets plenty of people in society who never had a great-grandfather of any sort ! And besides one has eight great-grandparents—perhaps yours weren’t all bargemen.”

“ Four may have been barge-women,” Frank was beginning ; but it struck him that the conversation was no longer professional. He swallowed his remark and coughed it down sepulchrally, in a way that really was quite professional—as though he had come to “ request a small payment on account.”

“ It is certainly Plymouth,” he declared, setting the group down upon the flat top of the piano, at which he had often sung. “ May I, madam, hope that you will continue your custom and patronage ? ”

Lady Salford looked somewhat surprised, and perhaps a little annoyed. She had not intimated that the interview was at an end.

“ I have to-day acquired some very splendid miniatures,” continued Jokes & Co., with his hand upon the door-handle. “ They are worth your inspection, madam : if you wished, they should be put aside until you had seen them.”

The lady at once expressed her intention of inspecting them on the following day, and begged they might be put aside, and Jokes & Co. withdrew.

CHAPTER VIII.

DURING the course of the next day Jokes & Co. did a very fair business, though the purchases did not amount to anything like what they had reached on the opening day. A very large Chesterfield sofa, covered with a beautiful silk tapestry, was sold, and for a couple of pounds more than it had cost, the purchaser being an old gentleman, who made a speciality of Italian art fabrics.

"I bought that tapestry at Siena," Frank explained to Lord Hounslow, who had looked in to see how things were going. "It was filthy then, but I spotted it at once."

"It would have been more to the point to get the previous spots removed," suggested this jocular young man.

"I did that afterwards. I am delighted to have sold that sofa ; it took up such a dreadful lot of room, and it was such a temptation to customers to sit down. It would soon have wanted cleaning again if it had not gone off."

But most of the things sold that day were small and cheap ; nevertheless when closing time arrived the firm was well satisfied.

"Old Gummy St. Roc is coming down here to-morrow," Lord Hounslow announced. "He is quite keen about buying Lady Olivia a *Virtu-ous* present here. I invented that joke while he was talking to me, and I practised it on him first. I said : 'Cousin Plantagenet, Olivia is such a piece of Virtue, that you

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ought to go to Jokes & Co. and buy her one for a wedding-present.' The pleasantry can be varied by turning it that way. He asked who Jokes & Co. was, and I said they were the people to whom everybody was now going to get art bargains. Mind you ask him twice what you intend to take ; he doesn't care for anything unless he bargains for it. He would rather give one and ninepence for something marked two and six, than pay eighteenpence for exactly the same thing if that was the price asked for it. And he would fancy he had cleared ninepence."

Having given this advice as to the treatment of his eccentric old cousin, Lord Hounslow lit another cigarette and sauntered off, not, however, before promising that one of his father's wagons should call early the next morning for the sofa, to remove it to the house of its purchaser.

In the afternoon a short note came by post from Lady Salford. It was addressed to the firm in the third person, and apologised for being unable to call at present and inspect the Cosway miniatures. Lady Salford had been called out of London by the illness of a relative, but she hoped to be able to return in a few days, and would then look forward to seeing the miniatures. As it turned out, she did not return for a fortnight.

Meanwhile many other articles had been brought to the shop by persons anxious to dispose of them. Some were of no use, and some were valued absurdly high by their possessors, especially when the latter happened to be entirely ignorant of the subject. But a fair proportion were good enough to purchase, and their owners were sensible enough to bear in mind that a dealer buys to sell again at a profit, and that, though he may ultimately realise a very good one, he

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may not be able to sell the article at all for years, so that it is so much absolutely dead capital.

As a rule Jokes & Co. found that the vendors of art objects were only too anxious to part with them, very much more anxious than the firm was to purchase them, and there was no need for any bargaining at all. In fact, Jokes & Co. would not bargain over their purchases.

"What price do you ask?" the firm would say. If the price named was such as to suggest a reasonable likelihood of profit, it would be given at once. If not, Jokes & Co. never offered a smaller price. They simply declined the article altogether.

A great many of the customers bought nothing but prints, and some of them would look through a whole portfolio and only buy a sixpenny print, or perhaps buy nothing at all. It must not be supposed that Jokes & Co. were always selling articles whose price was counted by guineas.

One day a very smart landau stopped outside, and a resplendent footman helped a very resplendent lady to descend. From the ducal coronet on the panel, and the large single letter under it, the firm of Jokes & Co. had no difficulty in arriving at the identity of the lady. The Duke of Fulham is the only duke whose title begins with F, and as there is no dowager alive this must be the reigning Duchess. Her accent soon clinched the matter, for it was unmistakable New England.

"I want to look at that round print of John, Earl of Lambeth," she announced, with a brief stare of surprise at the shopman, "the one in the gold olive-leaf frame in the window."

She need not have informed Jokes & Co. of the identity of the portrait, but the firm did not say so.

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The print was taken down and placed in the great lady's hands.

"He was our great-grandfather," she remarked in a slightly loud voice, and speaking almost as though she also belonged to a firm. "Lambeth is the second title in our family."

Jokes & Co. bowed with solemn respect. In the family of McSlay there had been as yet no first title, as the firm was amusedly aware.

"It is a very fine print apart from any family associations," the young man observed gravely. "It is also very scarce, for the plate was accidentally destroyed when only a few impressions had been pulled off. It is after Sir Joshua Reynolds. The original is at Fulham Court."

"I guess I know that," retorts the lady. "I'm the Duchess."

She stared at the portrait with her pretty head on one side.

"My husband has a birthday week after next," she announced. "It would be just lovely for one of my presents. What's the ruin of it?"

"It is ten guineas. But I have a Cosway miniature of the Earl's wife—Lady Agneta Bohun, the beautiful Countess of Lambeth. Would your Grace care to see it?"

She certainly would, and in spite of its very high price she bought it. Both print and miniature went away in her carriage, and next morning a cheque arrived for a hundred and ten guineas.

When Jokes & Co. had bought the miniatures they had been paid for by cheque, and now the firm made it its business to ascertain through what bank the draft had been cleared. As he expected, Frank found that the cheque had been cleared through a

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bank in the neighbourhood, to which he addressed the following letter for the lady :—

“MADAM,—We recently purchased from you, for the sum of twenty guineas each, six miniatures by Cosway, one of which we have now sold for one hundred guineas. We have pleasure in now enclosing a cheque for sixty guineas. Our own profit has been quite satisfactory, considering the quick turnover, and we remain, madam,

“Your obedient servants,

“JOKES & Co.,

“*p.p.* F. S.”

The firm did not mention this transaction to Lord Hounslow or anyone else. But its commercial conscience pricked it.

“It’s not business ; no, it’s *not* business !” the original partner admitted to himself as he wrote the cheque. “Perhaps I may never sell the other five at all. No, it isn’t business, and there’s no use pretending it is. And ‘business first,’ but ‘pleasure after’ ; it’s pleasure after.”

CHAPTER IX.

HALF an hour after Jokes & Co. had stepped in next door to post that unbusiness-like letter, the postman delivered one to the firm informing it of the return to town of Viscountess Salford, and requesting that the Cosway miniatures might be submitted to her. "Lady Salford," said the note, "will be at home and disengaged to-night at 8.45; and if the miniatures could be sent then it would give her great pleasure to see them. Perhaps the representative of the firm whom she already knows would bring them."

One soon gets used to a new state of life; and Frank did not now feel it particularly odd to be a shopkeeper. As he was a tradesman, he was glad that it seemed likely that he should be a successful one, that was all.

Lady Salford received him in the same room as before, and he was conscious that she still scrutinised him in the same watchful manner; but he found it much easier already to act his simple part, and appear impervious to her conjectures.

The lady was an instant victim to the miniatures. They were the most beautiful she had ever seen, and several of them were of family interest.

"I will keep them all," she said quietly. "I wonder you can bear to part with them."

"I only bought them," he answered, "to sell again—at a profit. That is our trade." He paused a moment, and then reminded the lady that she had not inquired the price.

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“ No, I forgot. Well, what is it ? ”

“ Five hundred guineas,” he replied. “ It is a good deal of money.”

“ Yes, it is. But I should rather have the miniatures than the money. Are there not six of them ? I thought you mentioned six ? ”

He explained that one of them had already been purchased by the Duchess of Fulham.

She sat down at an open bureau—of tortoise-shell inlaid with jasper and ivory and cornelian—and wrote the cheque.

“ To the order of the firm, I suppose ? ” she said.

“ Yes, madam, if you please.”

Her back was turned to him, but by her side was a small mirror, and, framed in its silver round, was the charming portrait of herself. The firm of Jokes & Co. sighed a little, catching sight of it, and wondered which of the miniatures was equal to it. On the bent face was a sort of smile—or so it seemed to the firm of Jokes & Co.

The young man drew still further back, and seemed to wrap himself closer than before in his quiet disguise of chill respect.

When the lady had blotted the cheque she stood up and turned to face him.

“ When are you going to take a partner ? ” she inquired.

“ Our business, madam, is not yet large enough to justify the firm in extending itself,” he answered.

“ I know someone who wants to join it,” she said.

Though she watched his face so carefully he betrayed nothing.

“ . . . He is quite sound financially,” she continued, still watching.

Jokes & Co. bowed again.

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"Anyone, madam, who obtains your recommendation is fortunate."

"The young man to whom I allude—who would like to join you in business," continued Lady Salford, "is called Lord Hounslow; his father, Lord Mortlake, is a very rich man."

Jokes & Co. bowed.

"You know Lord Hounslow, perhaps?" continued the lady, with the same watchful carelessness of manner.

"The name is quite familiar to me, madam," admitted the young man.

At that moment their eyes met, and the lady's were full of laughter.

"He is dining here to-night," she went on: "I thought he would be company for my younger sister, whom I brought back to London with me——"

The lady's blue-grey eyes were still laughing, but her voice was quite steady and innocent. As for Jokes & Co., that firm was beginning to look distinctly annoyed. The expression of its face demanded of the universe what possible concern it could be of his what dinner-guest Lady Salford might invite.

"Besides," added that lady calmly, "I know that Lord Hounslow would be so glad to meet *you*."

A sudden flush swept across Frank's expressive face; his manner grew ten degrees icier than before. He gave no other sign of having heard the lady's last words, and with a stiffly-respectful salutation, he turned to take his leave.

"If, madam, I can be of no further service to you, I will encroach no further on your goodness," he began, but Lady Salford laughed gently.

"Oh, but you can!" she declared easily. "You can help me to amuse Lord Hounslow."

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Her eyes travelled behind the firm of Jokes & Co., who turned involuntarily to follow them. Framed in the wide doorway leading to the saloon stood Lord Hounslow and a lady younger than Lady Salford, but singularly like her.

The doorway was an arch which could be filled by a rolling double door, sliding into the wall at either side; a heavy velvet curtain also draped the opening, and this Lord Hounslow was now holding aside.

The red flush deepened on Frank's face, and all three saw that he was annoyed.

"Now, my dear young man," begged Lord Hounslow persuasively, "do not look so savage. It is fortunate that the Evil Eye is not a British Institution, or I should shiver in my shoes."

"I am afraid," said the gentle voice of Lady Salford, "you accuse your friend of playing you false and not keeping your secret."

"I did my best," protested Lord Hounslow meekly. "It was not my fault if Jokes & Co. looked suspiciously like a gentleman."

Lady Salford's sister laughed. She had been considering the firm with obvious and undisguised interest.

"I should not have been deceived for an instant!" she declared in a subdued aside to the company in general.

"It is very tiresome!" ejaculated Jokes & Co., as if it meant it.

"What is?" inquired the company.

"Being found out," explained the firm, with a short laugh of considerable irritation.

"Found out!" cried Lord Hounslow. "Did-ums think we should serenely pass for a Jew curio-dealer?"

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"I said nothing about passing for a Jew," protested Jokes & Co.

"Why, you were bound to be spotted by the very first customer who entered the shop!" declared Lord Hounslow.

"I was the first customer," remarked Lady Salford mildly, but with complacence. "I certainly spotted!"

"For my part," declared Lady Salford's sister, "I object to all the laugh being turned against the eminent firm of Jokes & Co. It is not justified by the facts. Mr. Street——"

"Margaret!" cried Lady Salford.

"Miss Dene!" shouted Lord Hounslow.

"You're not going to turn the tables against us?" expostulated her sister.

"Aren't I though!" laughed Miss Dene, with a fine indifference to grammatical restrictions. "Mr. Street," she continued, turning to our hero, "I am rather hurt by your failure to recognise me again. I did think I had made a deeper impression."

The firm bent all its attention on the lady, with some glimmering of a suspicion that the voice was somehow familiar.

"Don't you remember writing to me?" she demanded. "Don't you even recall the little fact of having bought six Cosway miniatures of me?"

"Were you the distressed Miss Margaret Dene?" inquired Frank, with a dawning and rather grim amusement.

"I was—I was! But remember it was not my scheme; it was Annette and Lord Hounslow who invented the shameless plot. And it was Annette's miniatures I sold to you, and of which you have sold one to the Duchess of Fulham. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

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All four burst out together into peals of laughter.

And thus it was that the great intimacy began between Lady Salford and her sister, and Mr. Street and his friend Lord Hounslow, which ended, as may be told elsewhere, in a certain "Double Wedding in High Life."

CHAPTER X.

IF Lord Hounslow and Lady Salford imagined that the firm of Jokes & Co. must cease to exist because its identity with Francis Street, Esq., had been detected, they were lamentably mistaken.

As he walked home from Salford House the young man admitted to himself that the attempt to keep his shop-keeping a secret had been foredoomed to failure. But his shop-keeping had not been a failure at all: and there was no present reason whatever for abandoning it.

Lord Hounslow was walking beside him; but since leaving Salford House he had smoked in silence. He was half-expecting "a wiggling," and was half-ready to admit that he deserved it.

"Why did you come with me?" his friend presently inquired.

Lord Hounslow perceived that if there was to be any wiggling it was to open in a direction different from that which he had expected.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you came downstairs with me and left the house with me, and you wanted to give me a cigarette in the hall: and behaved altogether in a manner singularly unbecoming a young earl who

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happened to be quitting a lady's house at the same moment as one of her tradesmen."

"Oh, bunkum!" observed Lord Hounslow. "That little joke's obsolete now. You left the house as one of Lady Salford's acquaintances. It's all up with your being a tradesman."

Frank explained that this was far from being the case.

"I've got my living to earn whether my customers know my real name or not," he said, "and I seem likely to earn it very comfortably as Jokes & Co."

"Do you mean that you are really going to stick to it?"

"Of course. If the business succeeds as well as I intend it shall, I shall ultimately sell it, and do something with the money. Meanwhile, I have to work it up."

Lord Hounslow did not quite know what to say. He was a young man of a warm and generous imagination, and he had his own ideas as to what his friend's future was to be. But it was, he felt, rather easy to speak of them: and to speak without betraying them was, he was conscious, beyond his powers. So he sighed and held his peace.

"To-morrow is early closing day," remarked Frank, after a meditative pause, "and I'm going down into the country on business—to attend a sale, in fact. Oddly enough it's in a farm-house which used to belong to my grandfather: I suppose now it belongs to the National Debt."

Lord Hounslow, of course, recognised the allusion to old Jabez Street's eccentric will.

"How you can speak of it without gnashing your teeth," he said, "is beyond my comprehension."

"Even *your* comprehension has limits, you see,"

observed Frank, who had not quite forgiven his friend's betrayal of his secret to Lady Salford.

"That," declared Lord Hounslow solemnly, "is a very incorrect way of speaking—for one in your lowly position—to a nobleman."

They both laughed comfortably, and Lord Hounslow suggested that he should accompany his friend on the morrow. Frank had no possible objection to urge, except that it would be a waste of time and money: and as that trifling objection might have been urged with almost equal force against most of Lord Hounslow's occupations, it failed to be conclusive. So Frank told him that the station was Horley, and the train to catch was the 1.55 p.m. from Victoria; whereupon they said good night and parted.

At ten minutes to two on the following day Frank arrived on the platform, and was rather surprised to find his friend already there. He did not deny himself the pleasure of expressing that astonishment.

"Well," replied Lord Hounslow, "I have had the whole morning to catch the train in. You, I dare say, have done other things. How's trade?"

"Very lively. I've sold a lot of things; and the Duchess of Fulham came again. She wants engravings of all the Fulhams back to Adam, and wants them by Wednesday at a quarter to four."

"I've got the tickets," observed Lord Hounslow, restraining his friend from an obvious tendency to the booking-office, and holding two up rather ostentatiously.

"First class!" objected Frank reproachfully, and they moved along towards the carriage.

"Take your seats, please!" called a porter.

"Here we are," said Lord Hounslow. His face

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was rather guilty ; but he hoped, in the hurry, it might not be noticed. He held the carriage-door open and Frank jumped in.

“ Good morning, Mr. Street ! ” said Lady Salford.

“ Good morning, Mr. Jokes ! ” said her half-sister.

“ I ’ve got the tickets,” observed Lord Hounslow, holding up four this time, and stepping in with a brazen air of simplicity.

They all four laughed, but Frank did not deem it expedient to denounce the duplicity of Lord Hounslow at that moment. An old lady of an austere deportment occupied one of the corners, with her back to the engine, but her face against all mankind. She knitted noisily and very tightly, and her expression was one of vehement protest and disapproval. When the four young people laughed she elevated her eyebrows and pursed her lips, which were wide, but very pale and thin ; and when Lord Hounslow asked her whether she would dislike having the window open, she said, “ . . . four, five, six,” and snapped up a stitch as if it had been a caraway seed, and she had been some ugly, cross old bird.

The malign influence of this old lady seemed to damp even Lord Hounslow’s spirits for a while, and there was not, at first, much conversation. He sat trying not to watch her, and getting caught doing so about twice a minute, on each of which occasions he blew his nose guiltily and with evident supererogation.

“ Got a cold ? ” demanded the old lady at last, with such startling directness that Lord Hounslow had not presence of mind to pretend that he was indeed so afflicted.

She had just reached the end of a row, and she

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poised the vacant needle in the air as if about to harpoon him.

"Thought you hadn't," she retorted. "Snuffly habit."

Frank and Miss Dene got rather red in the face from trying not to laugh; Lord Hounslow got very red indeed, but not from suppressed mirth. Lady Salford remained serenely pale as was her habit. She was not nearly so good-looking as her sister, but her appearance was much more interesting. The old lady watched them, with her head on one side, and a clicking of the eyelids, immensely suggestive of a cassowary getting ready to peck.

"Sisters?" she demanded suddenly, addressing the party at large.

"Only two of us," murmured Lord Hounslow, anxious to regain his perkiness, but not speaking loudly enough to suggest a *bona fide* desire for retort.

Lady Salford looked amused, and admitted that the other young lady was her sister.

The Cassowary had finished another row, and she made another plunge at Lord Hounslow.

"Best-looking one the eldest, eh?" she demanded, leaning forward and affecting a whisper.

"They must be twins at that rate," replied the young man, with reviving spirit.

"Poof!" ejaculated the old lady, clicking her eyelids scornfully, and stabbing her needle into a stitch as if she was determined it should not evade her.

CHAPTER XI.

AT Croydon the old lady got out, and they had the carriage to themselves.

"Why did you let her in?" demanded Lord Hounslow of the two ladies.

"She never consulted us," replied Miss Dene. "I wish she had been going all the way; she was delightful."

"I do hope," said her sister, "*you* will never become delightful!"

"She never can," murmured Lord Hounslow, in what Frank called his "best manner." They all laughed, and the train moved on again.

It was a delightful afternoon, and they were all in good spirits at a few hours' emancipation from the glare and heat of London. In twenty minutes Horley was reached, and they got out. Quarter of an hour later they had reached Sheepcote, the farm where the sale was going on.

It was a delightful place, more like an old manor house than a farm, and it lay, among green lanes, surrounded by fields so well timbered as to suggest that they formed part of an ancient park or chase. The house was of old, mellow brick, lichen-rusted, and relieved by windows, chimney-stacks, and copings of worn grey stone. Behind, one caught glimpses of huge ricks; in front was a trim garden hedged with clipped box, and having in the centre a sundial of crumbling stone. The doorway was rather low, and broadly arched; over it, carved in stone, was

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a date that carried one restfully back to the wide times of Elizabeth ; and a symbol, once not uncommon—the full-faced sun shining down upon an opening flower, out of which springs a butterfly, new-delivered from its chrysalis, and *Thus, O my Soule !* incised about it.

Old as the place seemed, there was no suggestion of melancholy or decay about it ; only of a rich and placid peace, and a bland, steadfast ripeness.

The old garden filled the air with warm, sweet fragrance, and from the fields there crept other vague, pure odours, as though of the caressing hands of God laid upon the things that He had made and man had not trampled or destroyed.

Ever so far up, by the wide blue door of heaven, sang a lark. In a field not far off a few lads and girls were haymaking, and their cheerful laughter came pleasantly enough, mellowed by the intervening space of meadow and copse. The half-sensuous complaining of doves was just audible from a depth of wood some furlongs away to the east.

All the quiet influence of the place seemed to drop down upon our four Londoners, and drew them into a sort of friendly silence and contentment.

The sale was not at all like the auctions Frank had attended in London : it was, indeed, much pleasanter. Most of the things had been turned out on to a smooth lawn, or bowling-green, that ran along the west side of the house, and there, grouped, but not crowded, under the cool shadows of scented cedars, was gathered the thin concourse of those who had come to the sale. Except our friends they were all rustics, and, to say truth, few were buyers. The Sunday smartness of the ladies marked it as a holiday jaunt rather than a business expedition.

The auctioneer was himself local, and was full of

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the local suggestion of prosperous leisure. He had none of the snappish hurry of your London salesman ; his jests were at no particular person's expense and were of established reputation. As soon as he began one it was recognised, and his audience marshalled their grins in readiness for the well-known point. He did not seem to whip up the bidding with scorn or sarcasm, but just to jog it forward with a good-natured shove or so.

The auction seemed half picnic and half country fair.

All the best things were still unsold when our friends arrived. The sale had begun at "Twelve o'clock precisely," which meant, literally, about ten minutes to one ; and there had been farm stock, grass, hay, and implements to dispose of out of doors, and dairy and kitchen matters within.

Frank, who had heard by a lucky accident of the sale, had come after some fine old Chippendale furniture, and he found that there was some good china also. Some of the china Lady Salford bought ; and some her sister also got.

"I really must buy something !" declared Lord Hounslow. "I've no idea of letting you have all the fun. I wonder if that churn is sold ?"

The auctioneer overheard and regretfully informed him that it was, suggesting that there was a larger one that had been "overlooked," which would be put up when they dealt with the cheese-room.

Lord Hounslow made a pencil note on the back of a letter, with his tongue a trifle protruded to the left, which he had perceived was the local custom.

"I'm quite determined to get that Buhl cabinet," observed Lady Salford. "You're only going in for the Chips, aren't you, Mr. Street ?"

Mr. Street assured her that he did not propose

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to bid against her for the escritoire in question ; in fact, he considered it rather ugly, of a period that he was accustomed to despise as "exuberant."

"Jove!" exclaimed Hounslow. "Who'd have ever thought of cabinets getting exuberant. My mother used to call me 'exuberant,' when my other parent wanted to hide me for shutting five live rats in his hat-box."

The sale jogged leisurely on. The auctioneer sometimes stopped to take a drink of ale out of a brown jug, and sometimes to try and overhear the pleasantries of Lord Hounslow, which he appreciated immensely. No one was in the least hurry. Meanwhile the pleasant afternoon lay smiling in the happy fields, the fresh, light breeze came breathing coolly from the slumbrous woods, and still the flowers sweetened all the air, and in the great elms myriads of unseen insects droned their drowsy hum. The pigeons came and went unheeding of the little crowd, and strutted foppishly about the old paved yard and on the red-tiled roof. Albeit, the old farm was changing hands, and the old farmer had fallen quietly into willing sleep, and been laid, against the Great Awakening, to his long rest beside the ferny wall of the sunny churchyard. They were cheery philosophers, unmoved by this or that, and taking all things, life and the sleep after life, with equal mind.

When the sun went down behind the trees, and the four Londoners went back to the great weary town, they carried with them an abiding memory of the calm and constant peace of that long pleasant afternoon.

" 'Thus, O my soule,' " thought Frank, remembering the old symbol carven in the stone of the arched doorway.

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But his reverie was broken by the voice of Lady Salford.

“ Well, I have got my Buhl cabinet—and it was disgracefully cheap. Are you pleased with your Chips ? ”

“ But I haven’t got my churn,” complained Lord Hounslow.

CHAPTER XII.

AT Croydon Lord Hounslow could not be restrained from thrusting his curly head out of the window to see if the Cassowary was there.

"Of course she's not there," declared Miss Dene. "How absurd you are!"

"I wish I was," groaned the young man, pulling his head back very hurriedly. "There she is!"

But he was not quick enough to avoid being seen. The sharp, restless eyes had caught sight of him, and he had instantly been recognised.

"Open the door, I'm coming in," snapped the Cassowary.

Lord Hounslow obeyed without betraying any enthusiasm, and the old lady clambered in. He certainly did not want her, but he helped her very politely.

"Cold better?" she demanded, as soon as she had taken her seat and got out the knitting.

"No; worse," he replied gloomily.

"More snuffly, eh? Been sitting on damp grass, perhaps? Young. Silly."

She wagged her head sharply and counted "two, three, four!" as if she was disposing of him and the subject. But presently she looked up suddenly and clicked out another question.

"Father's gout better?"

Lord Hounslow looked a good deal surprised by this sudden show of interest in his parent's health.

"Bless us! Might have said something

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improper!" snapped the old lady. "Gout's quite modest. How's your father's?"

Lord Hounslow admitted that it occasionally troubled him.

"Always did. Tell him I asked. Know my name?"

The young man confessed that he had not that pleasure.

"Meaning, 'don't know, and don't care'! Well, it's Green! Signature, *J. M. Green*. But I'm not; not a bit of it."

Lord Hounslow bowed with a resigned air of misery. He was long since convinced that their travelling companion was a lunatic. She eyed him sharply.

"Think I'm crazy? Not a bit of it. Ask your mother—ask Dulcibella!"

Now it was quite true that the Marchioness of Mortlake did indeed rejoice in the ridiculous Christian name of Dulcibella.

At this point the old lady laughed, and they were all not a little grateful for so legitimate an excuse for a laugh on their own account.

"That's better!" snapped the old lady. "Swallowed our pokers now. Get on better."

"You seem to know my name, anyway," observed Lord Hounslow in a leading manner.

"So it seems," clicked the Cassowary, refusing his lead exasperatingly.

"Do you know all our names?" inquired Miss Dene unwarily.

"No! Didn't even know you had one," retorted the old lady. "What's yours?" she demanded, harpooning the firm of Jokes & Co.

"I trade as Jokes & Co.," it replied, handing her a business card with immense urbanity.

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" Rubbish ! You 're a gentleman," she snapped. " Twin's husband ? No ? Not at present ? Question premature ? " And the Cassowary cackled again. Her laughter was extraordinarily brief and of an incredibly hard and bony tone, like castanets.

" Well ! And how did you like Horley ? Poof ! Think one 's deaf ? Think one don't know all your names and all about you. Horley, yes. Porter said so first ; then the lilac twin " (it was true that Miss Dene's hat was adorned with that flower) ; " then the boy."

She nodded quickly at Lord Hounslow, and added that she should know him anywhere for a son of Dulcibella's.

" . . . Only better looking. Big mouth, and Dulcibella could not hide it. Moustache very useful."

No one made much attempt to reply to this extraordinary old lady's remarks. It called for an acrobatic agility of speech. But she did not seem to desire any replies.

" Pretty place Horley. Had a sister once. Went and lived there. Heaven knows why ! Sister pretty ; self plain. Self single ; sister silly. Sister married. Bad luck ; scamp husband. Sister dead ; self alive. Alive and ugly better than dead and pretty. Poof ! "

Ever as she clicked her restless eyes seemed to peck at theirs, keen, observant, shrewd, and watchful ; and the needles clicked, and the knitting grew longer. Her one beauty was her white delicate hands, and the knitting showed them off.

" Keep a shop ? Honour bright ? " she demanded, once again harpooning Frank. " Duke, I suppose ? Most dukes keep 'em now. Milk or coals ? "

Frank observed that it would be seen from the

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card he had handed the lady that his line of business was neither fuel nor dairy produce, but curios.

"H'm? Buy me? Sell again? Genuine antique—barocco, eh? Prob'ly unique—'hope so,' eh? Rude lad; certainly duke. Dukes all rude nowadays. Too good-looking, though."

It is impossible to suggest in print the rapidity with which all this was said, and yet with such a clear staccato that not a word was ever lost, even in the train.

At Victoria the old lady bade them a touching farewell, and assured Jokes & Co. she would come and look at his curios; to Dulcibella she sent her love.

"Whose love?" Hounslow managed to ask with abrupt presence of mind.

"Selina's!" clicked the Cassowary. "She'll know what Selina when you've mocked me. Good-bye, twins; there's my carriage . . ."

A very smart brougham was awaiting her, and quite close to it was Lady Salford's.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE following afternoon Lord Hounslow dropped in on Jokes & Co. with a note from Lady Salford to request that he would dine with her that night, to inspect the Buhl cabinet, which had arrived and was even now being unpacked.

"And who," inquired Frank, "is the Cassowary? Did Lady Mortlake recognise your description?"

"Rather. She's an old maid rejoicing in the name of Selina Twigg—highly appropriate, eh? Just what she does, eh?"

And the young man clicked imitatively.

"She had a sister," he continued, "who died years ago, and was very pretty; but she was rummy too; she took it into her head to disappear, and only emerged to announce her demise in guarded terms. Selina won't believe she is dead. Prefers to think she disgraced herself and retired to America or somewhere. . . . Of course, you'll come to-night?"

Frank, "after some slight affectation of uncertainty," as his friend put it, said he would. And eight o'clock found him in Lady Salford's drawing-room.

"Who do you think called on me to-day?" inquired his hostess when they had taken their places at table.

"The Cassowary," he replied, without an instant's hesitation.

"Yes. I was in, and she was quite delightful. She assured me that she preferred my appearance

to Margaret's, though of course Margaret was better-looking. And she successfully pumped out of me all about you and your shop. She is over head and ears in love with you."

"I thought it was Hounslow," laughed Frank.

"On the contrary, she considers him *futile*. I think *futile* is excellent, don't you?"

Everyone laughed, though Lord Hounslow's merriment was said by Miss Dene to be obviously forced.

"And," concluded Lady Salford, "I ended by telling her you were coming here to-night to have a look at my Buhl cabinet, and she barefacedly asked to be allowed to come too—to meet you, I'm sure, not the cabinet."

"Fancy being invited to meet a cabinet!"

"One is often asked to meet a bit of one," declared the jocular Lord Hounslow.

After dinner they all four left the dining-room together, and went at once to Lady Salford's library where the Buhl cabinet had been placed. Five minutes later Miss Twigg was announced.

Frank pointed out the excellences of the cabinet with great magnanimity, as he declared, seeing the article had not been purchased at his establishment, and that he did not personally admire Buhl.

"For my part," said Miss Dene, "I shall consider you have been cheated, Gladys, if it does not prove to contain a secret drawer."

"Enclosing a treasure," interpolated Hounslow.

"Of course," agreed Miss Dene. "Who ever heard of a secret drawer without a treasure? You insist needlessly on details, Lord Hounslow."

"If," observed Frank, "this cabinet contains a secret drawer at all, *this* is where it certainly will be," and he gently pressed a little inlaid pillar on one side

of an arched pigeon-hole. The "secret" drawer was there, and proved to be quite empty.

"Is there one on the other side too?"

"Not usually," replied Frank; "but you can try."

Miss Dene did try, and it proved that there was a second drawer. In it was a single piece of faded paper of official and uninteresting appearance.

"How stupid!" she complained; "the roll of banknotes has evidently been removed by some unscrupulous person. . . ."

"Before you could get at it," suggested Hounslow.

"And only this dull piece of paper left," continued Miss Dene, ignoring his interruption with dignity.

"It looks like a water-rate," remarked Lady Salford.

"Let us read it, at any rate," urged Frank.

The Cassowary nodded sharply, as if to point out that there was one sensible person besides herself in the company.

The paper that looked like a "water-rate" was handed to Frank, and he flushed oddly as soon as he had glanced at it.

For a moment he said nothing, but kept his eyes fixed on the faded paper, then he looked up and said quietly—

"I am sure, Lady Salford, no one sympathises more sincerely than I do with you in your natural disappointment at not finding hidden treasure. But to tell the truth, what you *have* found is of much greater importance to me."

"What is it?" they all asked. "Not another will of your grandfather's?"

"No; but something quite as surprising, and nearly as useful. This is the certified copy of the *marriage certificate* of my grandfather to"—and here

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Frank glanced at the Cassowary—"to Jessica Twigg on the 3rd of November, 1860."

He handed the paper to the old lady.

"H'm—yes. Jessica Twigg, daughter of Ephraim and Maria; pretty sister, right enough. Died next spring. Married Jabez Street, son of Hiram; never thought he had a father. H'm."

"But why," inquired Hounslow, "is this as good as a will? Explain position."

Everyone laughed; quite involuntarily he was again clicking like the Cassowary.

"This marriage," explained Frank, "took place in November, 1860; the disinheriting will is dated some time before that, and a subsequent marriage invalidates a will. So that my grandfather died, in reality, intestate, and his only child—my father—is still his heir at law."

"Oh, my aunt!" exclaimed the fervidly vernacular Lord Hounslow.

A Shadow of Death.

CHAPTER I.

I AM only a globe-trotter.

I am neither a Public Works, like young MacPegg, who lately shot himself in the bungalow down by the residency, nor a judge, like old Pawney, who, they say, has mislaid his wife. It need hardly be said I am not the Resident, and indeed I have quite as little business in Rajputana as he has. I am, not to put too fine a point upon it, merely a visitor staying with my ancient schoolfellow, Clive Warren, who has a queer billet in these parts in connection with ryots. Oddly enough, it is not his nominal duty to quell them; on the contrary, he has to "develop their interests and report thereon to the Supreme Government."

Our intimacy is of long standing, for it began in our boyhood, when it was Warren's custom—not exclusively of an afternoon—to punch my head, which, being very large, was much in request among my schoolfellows for that purpose.

We met again a month or so ago in Calcutta, whither I had arrived from Japan, on the business above alluded to, and where he was engaged in presenting one of those reports to the Supreme Government. We were as much delighted to see

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each other as might have been expected from our long and contented separation—*vide* the talented author of *Northanger Abbey*—and he immediately insisted on bringing me back here with him to see what Anglo-Indian life is like in an up-country station, and a native “Protected” state. I am no politician, and I must confess that until I came here I never understood why such an outcry is made at home against Protection. I quite see now it would never do for England.

But life here is very agreeable for those who are unprotected like myself, and it has a novelty surpassing that of any pantomime, and almost any curtain-lifter.

I mention my being merely a globe-trotter, because I hope thus to disarm criticism. I am not up to the minutiae of Anglo-Indian description: I can just call luncheon “tiffin,” and my early cup of tea “chota-házri.” I have presence of mind enough to offer fellows a cheroot when I want them to help themselves out of my cigar-case—and how warmly one urges their acceptance when they are Rs. 2.8 a hundred. Yes, and to pronounce cheroot as if it began with a capital “T.” I have broken myself of calling “gharis” cabs, and “pegs” whiskies and sodas. I shout for “ag” when I want the matches, and for “chokra” when I mean the waiter; but, bless you, I am nothing but a beginner, and when I talk Hindustani to the servants—natives, I meant to say—I break into a cold perspiration if they begin to answer me in that language. So, if I give things English names where I don’t know the Indian ones, I hope you will kindly excuse it—for Rome was not built in a day, and one can’t forget one’s native language in five weeks, however intelligent one may be.

One of my "imported ways"—as Warren calls them—is a habit of going out in the middle of the day to look for things to photograph, which, everyone assures me, will end in fever, and probably the grave. I did this at first in a small hat—I do think I'm coming on—but it gave such offence, that I had to take to a "terai," viz. two grey felt wide-awakes, worn one over the other in the traditional Hebraic manner. Even then I was told by all the station that I should have a touch of the sun before I was much older; but this I put down to local pride, for it is extraordinary how the Anglo-Indian plumes itself on the horrors of its climate.

A few days ago, in my midday wanderings, I found myself several miles from cantonments in a very characteristic spot, which at once took my fancy, and where I made up my mind that there was subject-matter for several volleys of my hand-camera.

It is a valley, not very wide, nor indeed very long—perhaps a quarter of a mile in width, and rather more than twice as much in length. It is entirely treeless, except that in one part of it there stands a group of dead banyans. Perhaps those weird trees require moisture about their roots, and certainly there was not enough anywhere in that valley to dissolve the gum at the back of a two-pie stamp—there's local colour for you! I begin to regret my foolish frankness as to being only a globe-trotter.

The valley is very stony, and the stones are evidently the chic place for the local residents to crawl and dart about on about midday. In the middle of the valley stands a ruined temple—I should rather say a temple very much out of repair, and apparently deserted. In India you can never

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exactly tell whether a temple really is deserted ; but there was certainly no clergy-house attached.

It was not an uncommon make of temple. There was a sort of little courtyard in front, surrounded by a low wall. Then a square room—the sanctuary itself—shut in by walls on three sides, the fourth consisting mainly of a wide doorway, with pillars and a couple of window-openings ; over all a minar, or blunt spire, rose forty feet or so into the air, this pagoda arrangement being very much enriched with carvings of Hindu gods and goddesses of singularly unfettered manners.

The front of the temple faced down the valley towards Benares or Timbuctoo, or some such sacred spot, the long, blank sides looking therefore to right and left. Opposite one of these, a dozen yards or less away, was another very tiny temple, suggestive of the bigger temple having pupped and drowned all the others.

I first photographed the valley as a whole, then, drawing nearer, opened fire on the two temples ; next I did the pup alone, after which I raked the front of the mother at close range, so as to show the carved pillars of the door, with a dusky glimpse of the bland Deity within—the gentle Parwati, wreathed with skulls, and belted with life-like human heads.

I ended with the weird dead trees, after which I began to feel that the valley was constructed on the principles of a bain-marie, only that it was upside down, and I was entirely exposed to the fire above me.

I therefore retreated to the pup, intending there to eat my biscuits and drink the tepid liquid out of my flask, and perhaps fire another parting shot or so at the parent bird while doing so. It was not disagreeable to find oneself in the shade, and I sat

down in the tiny sanctuary with a sense of making myself at home that Ganesh himself could not have surpassed, though it was his shrine. I took the stopper from the flask, and began to suck out its contents with no other preoccupation than that of preventing my tongue from being dragged up inside. I then munched a sandwich, with a brutal disregard of its beefy unfitness in that place, that would have done honour to an old-established sahib of the sahib-log.

But suddenly my munching stopped dead in mid munch, and the meaty slice was suffered to drop unheeded out of the unbitten fragment in my hand. So that on the floor of Gunputty's shrine lay a portion of the Sacrosanct Gaigosht, and yet he smiled inanely out of his wide elephant mouth, and rakishly as ever held his trunk to one side, and gesticulated with his four hands.

What made me stare was this :

There was the valley—that alone would not have so much surprised me—there was the heathenish, irrelevant temple turning its blind side-wall to me, and there was that ghostly group of what had been trees, and over all the blazing fires of an Indian midday sun. The whole valley panted and gasped in the horrible glare—the air swayed and shivered over the baked rock and slag ; and all this I noticed with a strong apprehension, quite different from the merely pictorial notice I had given the scene at first, and yet I was consciously regarding now none of these things. My eyes were fastened on the line of blank, blazing wall in front of me, and my eyes were probably starting out of my head.

I have read many ghost stories in my time, and I have noted with true concern the degeneration of the species, for what could be feebler than the mere contemporary spook ? There have been times when

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I was younger when I have read of ghosts until such a sense of the supernatural came over me that I truly deserved the Victoria Cross for venturing alone after dark into the spare bedroom. But never, until that day, in the pitiless light of an Indian noon, had I fully learned what supernatural horror means. It means a sort of chilly, burning sickness, and pervading, penetrating sense of contamination, and vague dread—as a foul criminal might feel suddenly arrested, without any information as to which of his crimes has been dragged to light, a shuddering, nerveless wretchedness, a sinking at the heart, as if one's soul should be slipping down out of its raiment of the flesh into fathomless, cold depths beneath.

It was a sudden, sharp revelation of wickedness, a personal consciousness of the presence of crime. And yet what I actually saw as yet was only this : on the wall over against me was a shadow, the shadow of a man, silhouetted sharply on the dazzling, shadeless stone, as upon a screen.

Now when we see shadows on a screen in common life, the screen is of translucent fabric, the shadow is thrown on it from a light behind. But here the screen was of solid stone, and the light was almost directly overhead, if anything, a little on my side of the wall. The shadow should have fallen the other way, foreshortened, on to the flagged pavement between me and the temple.

And what cast the shadow-shape ? Where was this tall, slight man of the sahib-log—as was plain from his dress—whose presentment was before me ? With a thumping heart I crept out from my little shrine and peered around. Except myself there was nothing that had life in all the valley, save the darting lizards on the stones. And the shadow was

not motionless: it moved, so that sometimes one would have said that the man who cast it must be facing towards me, then he would turn his side face, and the profile was clean-cut against the glaring stone. A very handsome man, one would say, with fine, high-bred features; of masterful bearing, and impatient. And presently another shadow grew upon the wall—a girl's, but not an English girl's. The dress was native, and there was something Eastern in the very walk and mien of this shadow lady—for she was a lady. One felt it without arguing from the difference between her dress and that of the ordinary Hindu women of the bazaar.

And now they met; and I stood breathless, watching, as if gazing on an acted tableau, but with what a different interest! My heart had risen up into my throat and seemed to choke me with its sickening beating. I had a horrible, unreasoning knowledge that I was staring at the first scene of a tragedy.

They met, and the girl was drawn into the young man's arms, and there upon his breast she lay contentedly; her head was pillowed on his breast, and his was bent upon it; and now there came upon the stone another shadow, another actor took part in the strange drama. At the corner of the wall, towards the bottom of the valley—the corner nearest to the front of the temple—appeared the shadow of a muffled hand; it crept farther forward on the screen of stone, showing a draped arm, and finally part of a face was shadowed on the wall; this was a man's, but not a European's: there was enough of the silhouetted to show the Rajput lunghi, and the very features were those of a Hindu.

But in his hand he held a strange thing: at first its shadow was not separated from his own, but

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presently it writhed out into distinct representation. It was the twisting, curling shadow of a cobra, held fast round the neck by the hood, its long body slowly coiling in the air. Then he who held it stooped, his whole head being shadowed on the stone as he leaned forward, and the cobra was set upon the ground. The arm was withdrawn, the hand and face disappeared ; there were left only the shadowed lovers, and making towards them, creeping rapidly, the frightful snake.

An insane cry of warning broke from my parted lips ; it woke the stony echoes of that hateful valley, and sounded ghastly to myself as the rocks and temple gave it back ; but the fated lovers did not hear. Wreathed in that pictured embrace, they heeded nothing but themselves, and towards them writhed the hooded reptile ; low and indeterminate was his horrid shadow as he slid along the ground, but now close behind the man he slowly reared himself into sight, and once again I cried aloud, though my throat was parched and the sound came stifled, as when one tries to shout in nightmare.

Back the deadly reptile drew his head, broader was the hideous hood displayed, and then he struck ! —as he did so his shadow losing itself in that of the young man who was his victim.

My eyes burned within my head ; I covered them for one moment with my hand, and when I looked again there was nothing ! There blazed the flat wall in the shadeless light, and on it not one smallest shadow of anything animate or inanimate.

CHAPTER II.

MY name is Clive Warren : I am collector of the Ranipur district, and I hold a special mission from the Supreme Government as well. I have been in this station about ten months, having been transferred from the Garamabad district last April.

Six or seven weeks ago I knocked up against old Brock in Calcutta, where he was on the globe-trot, and brought him up here to show him what life in up-country stations is like. I wish to goodness I had let it alone. He is likely to be a hideous nuisance to me.

He is the most pig-headed ass in Asia, and he used to be a harmless poor devil, who generally did what one told him, and was contented. I should like to have seen him kick up his heels at school as he has been doing here.

To start with, he began with the idea—that all your globe-trotters have—that India is rather a chilly place, if anything, and behaved himself accordingly. It was quite useless to warn him that if he would go out in the middle of the day, prowling round for things to photograph, he would be down with fever before he had been a week in the station. He stuck to it, and as a rule went about in a small hat, as if he was on a walking-tour in Greenland.

Of course, the natural result accrued : he has had such a touch of the sun that he has gone quite silly. Though goodness knows it was not worth his while to go off his chump ; there was so little of it at best.

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He came in one afternoon about an hour and a half after tiffin-time, and frightened my wife out of her wits : he was so strange in his manner, so restless and excited. He did nothing but ask for me, and as soon as I appeared let me see at once that he was not himself. He became fiercely mysterious, and talked a parcel of rot about some terrible crime that he was on the scent of—I declare it made a fellow quite jumpy to listen to the man. Talk of nervous excitement ! I never saw anything like it. Well, I sent round for old Pillett, and he sloped in, quite by chance as it were, and as soon as he looked at Brock, called out, “ I say, my dear fellow, you ’ve done it at last. You ’ve got fever ! Let ’s have your temperature.”

Brock did not seem a bit keen about shoving the thermometer into his mouth, and swore he had nothing the matter with him : only, he muttered, he had been witness of a terrible tragedy, and he could neither rest nor be easy till he had done something towards its discovery. But Pillett was quite firm, and for a minute or so Brock had to hold his tongue, and stand still with the thermometer sticking out of the corner of his mouth, while we tried to chat indifferently.

When he had got it back Pillett looked a bit puzzled ; then he shook the thing, and seemed to think of trying it again, but Brock would not have it at any price.

“ Certainly there is no great fever,” admitted the doctor-sahib gloomily, as if he had hoped to find a hundred-and-six point-eight or thereabouts, “ but I should strongly advise your going to bed, Brock.”

But Brock intimated pretty plainly that he did not want anybody’s advice.

“ I shall go and see the judge,” he remarked, earnestly, “ or is it the Resident ? Does one go to the

Resident or the judge about criminal cases—in cases of murder, for instance ? ”

Pillett and I tried not to catch each other's eye : all the same, I felt a sort of creepiness down my back. Who so quiet as old Podgy Brock at ordinary times ! The very last chap one would have suspected of jim-jams. The doctor spoke soothingly. But Brock grew extremely shirty, as if he twigged perfectly.

“ It is useless speaking on a matter of such importance to fellows like you,” he declared with great candour. “ If a horrible crime could be traced with quinine or a clinical thermometer, you 'd be invaluable ; but as it is, I shall go to the Resident. If he 's not the right man, he at least will have sense enough to tell me who is.”

We thanked him kindly, and Pillett said “ All right.” But all the same he advised me presently not to lose sight of the poor chap. So off I started and dogged him to the residency, where it was “ darwasa band,” so we might both have saved ourselves the trouble. But he was not going to be done. Off he trotted to the judge's bungalow at the very other end of the cantonments, and all on his two feet, mind you, as if the early afternoon was just the time for tramping along a particularly badly-shaded road in Rajputana.

The judge had gone to Chotamahál last night, and was not expected back till late to-night, so there was another disappointment. Back we trudged together, Brock seeming too much preoccupied to resent my having followed him.

“ You know a place about two miles from here, where there 's a temple in a little valley ? ” he suddenly asked me.

I am a fellow who takes no interest in the neighbourhood beyond my work, and I seldom poke round

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in search of the picturesque. I did not seem to recognise the place, though he went on to describe it more fully.

"I don't know what it may be called," he said, "but it is a mile or so beyond Sikandra, and the temple is one to Devi."

As about ninety per cent. of the temples are dedicated to that divine female, that did not help me much. Personally, Hindu temples bore me to extinction.

"It is a horribly weird, lonely place," he went on. "I was there this morning."

I remarked that, were I he, I should go there no more. It was evidently an undesirable spot; it was there, no doubt, he had got his fever.

But he paid no attention whatever to my practical suggestion, and went on eagerly with the most awfully lunatic farrago of nonsense you ever heard. I had one intense feeling of thankfulness, which was that he was a friendless bachelor. If he were to die on my hands, what embarrassment this would spare me. I know nothing less easy than to write and tell a lady you have had the pleasure of burying her husband this afternoon.

At last he seemed to have some consciousness that I was aware he was raving, after which he fell into an irritable, moody silence. By bed-time he really had a much higher temperature: but still Pillett seemed disappointed with it.

"It's high," he said, "certainly. But not nearly high enough to account for the delirium."

In the middle of the night I heard him moving, and went to his door.

"For goodness sake do not bring a light!" he shouted.

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Then I heard him run to the door and turn the key in the lock.

“ I am developing ! ” he called out through the door. “ Don’t you mind me—I am all right.”

I was beastly sleepy, and went back to bed. I certainly hoped he would not develop much further : for old Podgy Brock he had already developed considerably. In the morning Pillett came round to see him.

“ It ’s an awfully rum case,” he confided to me, after again taking the temperature, and asking him a number of questions. “ There is fever, no doubt, but nothing very much, and the whole thing does not fit a bit with the ordinary India fever. It is much more like a sort of brain-fever.”

Old Pillett insisted on his lying low that day, at all events, and after a lot of fuss he consented, but only on conditions, the principal condition being that the Resident and the judge should be brought to see him. Accordingly they came, Pillett and I being present.

“ Are cases of snake-bite common here ? ” he began, and the doctor and I looked straight to our front : he was as sharp as mustard, and would have caught us sniggering in a moment.

The Resident shifted a bit in his chair, and said they were, unfortunately, terribly common.

“ It is computed,” he stated, “ that eighty thousand people die of snake-bite every year.”

“ Mostly natives,” interjected the judge comfortably.

“ But in this neighbourhood ? ”

“ This district is not specially unlucky : no, the Deccan, I believe, suffers more.”

“ But cases occur ? ”

“ Oh, frequently : large numbers, in the course of the year.”

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"So that isolated cases would not attract much attention?" queried Brock eagerly.

"Well," replied the Resident, "it is as the judge remarked: the vast majority of cases are those of natives. You see, they go about with bare legs. If any of our fellows are bitten it is mostly through a thick boot. Fatal cases are very rare among us."

Brock paused; then he stared intently at the Resident, and demanded—

"Do you remember any?"

"I remember one: it was poor young Savile of the 32nd Lancers. He was attached to the Lieutenant-Governor of Madras, A.D.C. or something. Very good-looking fellow."

"Tall?"

"Well, no. Rather a tight little chap; but a tremendous sportsman."

"You're sure he was short?"

"Certain. All those Saviles are; comes from breeding in-and-in, I expect. Lord Kingstown's people and the Dundrum Saviles are always marrying one another."

Brock seemed disappointed.

"When was he here?"

"Here! Bless you, he never was here. It happened near Ooty. He never was in the North-West Provinces or Central Provinces."

Brock fell back haggard.

"But here?" he persisted, "do you remember no case here?"

The Resident shook his head.

"I've only been here two years," he said; "there has been no case since I came."

"I've been here five, and there's been no case," said the judge, as if it was due to him that there had not.

"Has no one been here more than five years?" asked Brock, almost indignantly.

"Well, most of us find five years quite long enough," said the Resident blandly; and we all grinned our agreement with him. "Ranipur is no catch, I can tell you."

"Chudder's been a long while, I fancy," observed Pillett meditatively.

Chudder is bear-leader to the young rajah. At the moment he was on leave; at which intelligence Brock gnashed his teeth openly.

"And now," inquired the Resident mildly, "why do you want to know all this? It seems to have some peculiar interest for you, Mr. Brock."

If Brock were not the future Lord Gracechurch I doubt if the Resident would have answered all his potting questions as patiently; but the Resident is one of those men who can no more help cottoning to a title than some other men can help pulling the last leg sharp into bed at night lest the devil should grab hold of it.

"Interest!" cried Brock: "it's not only peculiar, it's terrible. If it is not unravelled some awful crime will go unpunished."

Again we looked to our front, and the judge fidgeted. He had a constitutional horror of anyone with the jumps. He had had them himself, and liked to forget it.

"Listen!" said Brock, turning sharp on us, though none of us were interrupting, "I will not say now why I have asked all these questions. I had meant doing so when I asked you to come here; but I will ask you to go with me where I was yesterday, and at the same hour; and if you need then to inquire the reason of my questions I will certainly tell you."

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He proceeded to tell us where he was yesterday, but Pillett put a stopper instantly on the idea of his going there or anywhere else that day.

“And you choose the very time of day that would be most dangerous ! My good sir, you are in a very nervous state, and a very little would unhinge you altogether.”

For three or four days Brock consented to wait, then he would wait no more, and the day before yesterday we accompanied him to his bothering valley, where he led us to a little temple facing the side-wall of a bigger one.

“It is about a quarter of an hour too soon,” he said, sinking his voice to a sort of mystic whisper, “but that is better than being too late.”

He was evidently highly excited, and Pillett shook his head ominously as he listened to him. I pulled out a cheroot, but Brock almost knocked it out of my hand.

“Good heavens !” he said, in a passionate, stifled voice, “would you stand smoking here with such a tragedy enacted within a dozen feet of you ?”

The judge fidgeted, and Pillett hardly tried any longer to hide his opinion of poor Brock’s state.

He led me aside.

“We ’d better pretend to see whatever he says he sees,” he whispered ; “it ’s the only way.”

I nodded, and presently Pillett got hold of the Resident, who promised to act on the tip.

As the time drew nearer poor Brock’s excitement was really something terrible to witness. He broke into a cold sweat, and his whole body shook. We all pretended not to notice him : Pillett said it was the only way.

“Now !” whispered Brock.

He had his watch in his hand, and I could see it

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was just twenty-five minutes past one. His lips looked parched, and he could hardly articulate the words. We watched his face ; it was turned upon the flat line of wall of the temple opposite. His eyes were fixed upon it as if he were in a mesmeric trance, and Pillett told me afterwards that he then began to think it was, in fact, some very rum case of hypnotic influence.

"What do you see?" whispered the doctor earnestly, as if he saw the deuce of a lot himself.

But Brock shook his head.

"Nothing yet," he said ; "perhaps my watch is fast."

We waited breathlessly, though none of us but poor Brock had the least expectation of seeing anything at all. The mere strain of waiting thus in silence makes one feel queer, just as when one is watching artillery practice, and waiting for the gun to go off.

At last Brock drew a long breath.

"What time do you all make it?" he asked, and we told him.

The mean time between us was thirty-one minutes past one.

"It was all over the other day by twenty-six minutes past," he said ; "but it is possible my watch was slow then. The real time may have been later."

We nodded, and waited on in silence. At last I could not stand it any longer.

"Your watch must have been slow indeed the other day," I observed bitterly ; "or it may be that tragedies do not, after all, occur here daily. Few places are so fortunate as that."

"The tragedy may have happened years ago," he replied, still glaring at that flat expanse of wall.

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"I beg your pardon, I thought it was on Monday," I remarked with withering sarcasm.

"No, no : you do not understand," he answered.

I admitted that that was very probable, and after a few more minutes Brock himself said there was no use in waiting any longer. He looked puzzled and worried, and Pillett told me afterwards it would have been almost better for the chap if he had fancied he had seen something. We started home, Brock growing calmer as we got farther away from the valley.

He was evidently busy with his own thoughts. I thought he would apologise for our having seen nothing ; but he did not. As we were turning into our compound, he suddenly asked—

"And Chudder—when will he be back ? "

"Chudder ? "

"Yes. Didn't you say that was the name?—the young rajah's bear-leader, who has been here a long time."

"Oh, ah—yes, that's his name. Why, he took a year's leave to Europe. He's only been gone a month. He'll be back in about eleven months."

"That fits in well enough," remarked Brock, getting out of the tum-tum, and he walked into the bungalow looking easier in his mind than I had seen him for the last four days.

This morning he went off *en route* for Mount Abu, Ahmedabad, Baroda, and Bombay. I must say I breathed more freely when I was rid of him. I wonder whether I had better write a line to old Gracechurch about him. He seemed so sensible the last day or so I do not think it is necessary.

CHAPTER III.

ELEVEN months ago I wrote the above, and now I have to add a sequel. I was sitting with Pillett a week ago on my verandah, smoking, and was just about to raise a peg to my lips when a tonga drove in at our compound, and who should be in it but old Brock.

"Good lord!" I ejaculated.

"I am quite well, thank you, Warren," says Brock, as free and easy as you please, jumping out of the tonga, and coming up the verandah steps with a hand-bag. "How do, Pillett? Have you a bed for me, Warren? If not, I'll go to the dák-bungalow. You did not expect me, did you?"

Of course I didn't; but it was bosh talking of the dák-bungalow. Anglo-Indian hospitality is not what it was: in these days of trains and tourists we really cannot afford it. But we have not arrived yet at leaving an old schoolfellow to the bleak comfort of a dák-bungalow.

My bearer was already seeing about Brock's baggage being taken indoors. He now inquired very politely, but without much enthusiasm, for Mrs. Warren and the butcha.

"There are two now," I replied, rather sadly; "they're all right, thanks."

"And Chudder?" continued Brock eagerly.

"Chudder!" cried Pillett and I in a breath.

"Yes; is he back? He was on leave, you know, when I was here before."

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We stared. Of course he was. Brock had never, so far as we knew, clapped eyes on him.

"Oh, yes, he's back. He got back last week. It's very nice of you to ask after him," I said sarcastically.

But Brock was not a bit sat on.

"Let's see," he said, "whereabouts is his bungalow?"

"It's the big one nearest to the palace gates, at the bazaar end of cantonments," I answered in astonishment.

"Do you feel inclined to stroll that far and introduce me?" asked Brock, as cool as a cucumber, and I actually got up, and away we went, all three of us. As Pillett remarked afterwards, there's a sort of power about the chap. Brock had only arrived in Bombay three days ago.

"You'll probably get a letter to-morrow," he said, "to tell you I'm coming. By the way, I'm engaged to be married now."

I remarked sweetly that that accounted for his sudden determination to revisit Asia. Whereat he stared.

"On the contrary," he declared gravely, "it made it rather hard to arrange. Nor is my determination at all sudden; I always intended to come back. I only waited for Chudder's return."

Pillett had my arm, and he dug me in the ribs in a way that a doctor might have known was dangerous.

"He ought to be thundering grateful," I observed. But Brock took no notice; his power of ignoring the most biting sarcasm constitutes his peculiar strength. He is as invulnerable as a tortoise.

Chudder Sahib was at the palace, but I left word that he was to come and dine with us, and as it turned out he did so. As soon as they were

introduced, Brock handed him a chit in an envelope, coolly remarking that he would call on Major Chudder next day about noon.

I had no opportunity of getting hold of Chudder alone to assure him that my old friend was really quite harmless. But luckily they got on like a house afire.

"Warren," said Brock to me next day about quarter to twelve, "I'm going to keep my appointment with Major Chudder. I have asked him to come with me to that valley. Would you like to come with us?"

"Hadn't we better get the Resident and the judge and Pillett?" I inquired. "They enjoyed it so last time."

"Pray do not come if it bores you," said Brock calmly. "Chudder is really more suitable. I merely made the offer."

For some reason I decided to go with him. There's a deal of human nature in a man, as the late Mr. Lowell observes, and his obvious indifference as to whether I went or stayed at home made me rather keen to go.

At Chudder's door there was a dog-cart, and Chudder himself was ready. We jumped in, and in a quarter of an hour were near the valley.

"We'll get out here," he said, "and send the sais home with the cart."

He proceeded to do so, telling the man to return for us in three-quarters of an hour.

"What you wrote to me is very strange," said Chudder, as we walked towards the valley, turning to Brock.

"Is it possible you came out again to India about that affair?" I asked Brock.

He nodded gravely.

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"It was on my conscience. A ghastly crime has been brought to my knowledge, and I feel bound to do what I can to bring it to light."

"But, Brock, we came here with you and saw nothing."

"I know; but what I saw is perhaps to be seen only once in the year, on the anniversary of the crime's committal. This is the day: it is a year ago to-day since I saw this thing." He turned to Chudder: "And do you," he asked earnestly, "remember any case of death from snake-bite among the sahib-log here?"

"Yes, one; and that is the strange part of it. It was a young fellow who was assistant judge here then—seven years ago at least—and I well remember him. He was very much what you describe: tall, stalwart and slim, with thin aquiline features, and very aristocratic bearing. He was about seven-and-twenty, or perhaps thirty."

We were in the valley. Certainly there was something ghastly about it: a sort of horrible criminality in its suggestion.

"That was very odd about the photograph," said Chudder. Whereupon I looked interrogatively at Brock, who made an explanation.

"Do you remember how you and Pillett were determined I had fever that day? Well, I admit I was feverishly excited, and I could not sleep. So I got up and lighted my developing lamp, and started developing a plate out of my hand-camera. To my intense surprise I found it was a photograph of the scene I had witnessed here; then I remembered that when I had cried out and started back, I had brushed against the catch with my sleeve and I suppose the plate was exposed; of course, the plates and exposure are instantaneous—anyway, there it

was. Just as I was trying to intensify it—hydro-quinine is a wretched developer, though it is clean—you came banging at my door, and flurried me so much that on getting back to the washing-stand, where I was working, I dropped the plate on to the marble top, and it smashed into a hundred atoms.”

There was nothing the least cracked about Brock’s manner to-day, and as Chudder seemed to take him quite seriously, I quietly did the same.

“Here we are,” observed Brock, coolly pulling out a small hand-camera and adjusting the exposing-pin, so that one touch would fire it off. We none of us now spoke much; Brock was evidently again growing excited, but so, I think, were we all three.

“Now!” said Brock, and he pointed to the wall opposite us. He had his watch in his hand, and this time his calculations were not out.

A creeping sensation came in my back, for there, sure enough, plainly pictured on that blazing, sunlit wall, was the shadow of a young man such as Chudder had described.

“My God!” gasped Chudder, as the profile was cut sharply on the wall, “it is poor Carnegie!”

Click went the camera; and quite calmly and yet with an intense restrained excitement, Brock pulled out the exposing-pin again. We watched, staring at that blank wall as if our eyes were glued to it, and I could plainly hear Chudder’s heart thumping against his side. If anything Brock was the calmest of us; my own breath seemed to choke me as it came.

Another portrait on the wall! A girl’s, a native girl’s, but no bazaari one. There was all the grace, all the haughtiness of a Rajput princess in her figure and in her movements.

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"Do you know her also?" whispered Brock, as if the shadow might hear him.

I looked at Chudder: he was deathly pale.

"It is Saráswati, the princess," he stammered, "elder sister of the rajah himself. Her father was not the rajah's, they were half brother and sister. She was called Moti Mahál, the Pearl of the Palace."

"Yes," he stuttered hoarsely, "it is Lal Singh, the girl's father. Such a deed would be held glorious in a Rajput prince, whose daughter had forgotten her pride."

"Do you think," inquired Brock presently, "that with the evidence we have he could be brought to justice?"

Chudder shook his head doubtfully.

"Veels vithin veels," thought I, too limp as yet for speech.

We started back to the place where the dog-cart was to meet us.

"Sahib," said the sais, when we got up to it, "there has been a sudden thing in the palace."

"In the palace! I was there less than two hours ago," said Chudder.

The sais nodded.

"Achcha, sahib! An hour ago all right. Half an hour ago Lal Singh Sahib, the rajah sahib's uncle, drop dead in the palace."

Reversions.

CHAPTER I.

“ I PLAINLY perceive,” observed Lady Haddon, “ that you are about to make a fool of yourself.”

Lady Haddon is universally spoken of as the most charming woman in the world, and her manner now lacked none of its usual sweetness.

Her brother thanked her ; but his charm of manner was not so great, nor were his tones so sweet.

“ It is obvious,” explained the lady, “ that before you leave Haddon you will have proposed to Marjory Eccleston ! ”

Her manner retained its blandness, but it is possible that there may have been the slightest conceivable elevation of tone.

“ Admitting the justice of your ‘ wild surmise ’—what then ? ”

Captain Dorset drew a clean envelope towards him and began to draw upon it a picture of a little man with a hump putting a very improbable horse at a very impossible fence. It was not the hunting season ; but when idle or annoyed, this gentleman was apt to

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draw little timber horses with little afflicted men on them.

"If anyone were to bang a door now, or the house were to be struck by lightning," remarked his sister, watching him, "you would bite the tip of your tongue off."

It was true that he was also much given to protruding the extremity of that unruly member, obliquely to the left, when engaged upon his sketches.

"Doors are not banged in your well-ordered house," he retorted, regretting that he found it impossible to keep the tongue out while he talked. "And if the house were struck by lightning *you* might be killed yourself."

He wagged his head sidewise with some complaisance; but as the weather was singularly bright and clear Lady Haddon did not seem much alarmed.

"If," she said, returning to the question of Miss Eccleston, "you propose to her now, you will be a goose. She has not got two red cents to knock together."

"Fortunately," observed Captain Dorset, "I have no desire that my wife should spend her time knocking cents together, red or blue."

Lady Haddon laughed indulgently at this easy pleasantry.

"All the same," she hinted, "they are convenient things to have. One need not knock them unless one feels inclined."

"The red cent is not a peculiarly valuable coin in any country," objected the young man; "in Great Britain it is not even current."

His sister laughed again; still indulgently, but with a certain *arrière-pensée* that Captain Dorset heard and instantly resented.

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"The metal," she said, "that Madge Eccleston is so rich in is current coin in no quarter of the globe—though doubtless useful everywhere."

"And that?" inquired her brother, savagely increasing the difficulties of his fence by the wanton addition of a brook on the near side of it.

"Is brass," replied the lady suavely.

The young man scowled fiercely, and was about to exclaim, but Lady Haddon had not finished.

"That girl has more assurance than any six ordinary women of her age. She might be five-and-thirty."

"Of course she might—if she had been born in 1863!"

Captain Dorset fired this volley with a rather brutal laugh. Lady Haddon reddened, for she recognised the allusion to her own birthday on the 3rd of April in the year mentioned, whereas for many years she had been universally known as seven-and-twenty.

Her brother was not spiteful, nor at all given to striking below the belt. Not given, in fact, to engage in Amazonian warfare at all. But he had been surprised into ill-temper by his sister's tone in speaking of Miss Eccleston.

"Madge Eccleston," he continued, seeing that his sister had one foot already in the stirrup of her high horse, "has, at all events, two qualities that should commend her to your fellow-feeling. She is beautiful, and has a delightful manner."

"Admitting my beauty and my manners," remarked his sister—not, as he perceived, admitting those of Miss Eccleston—"it does not appear that you can live upon them."

"Your beauty and your manners secured Haddon and eleven thousand a year," remarked her brother,

slightly softening the asperities of the take-off in his picture.

She laughed.

"You don't mention poor Walter," she suggested.

"I meant *him* when I said Haddon," declared the young man, grinning mendaciously.

"But," objected the lady, "if Madge marries you her beauty and her manners will *not* have secured a baronet, a castle, and (as you optimistically put it) eleven thousand a year."

"She will have secured me!"

"Exactly!"

They both laughed; their ill-temperes were not serious.

"My dear Mark," said his sister confidentially, "the truth is you would *both* be throwing yourselves away. *She* could do much better, and so could *you*."

"But if we love each other?" inquired the warrior, surveying his hunchback equestrian with the indulgent fondness of a creator.

Lady Haddon made a peculiar noise in her throat, not really an aristocratic sound: a sort of compromise between a cluck and a snort.

"Love your grandmother!" she ejaculated.

"Why, certainly," asserted the gentleman. "But you know I am expressly forbidden to *marry* her!"

His sister laughed again.

"About the only commandment you've ever kept," she declared uncharitably.

"Not at all," asserted her brother stoutly, willing to justify himself like the lawyer. "I have never removed my neighbour's landmark. That crime must have been prevalent at an epoch when hedges were more portable than they are now."

"Now go, like a good boy," begged the lady, "and let me answer all these tiresome letters."

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The young man lighted a cigarette and stepped out of his sister's window on to the broad stone terrace that runs along the south front of Haddon Castle.

"I cannot trust him," thought the lady; "he is selfish in a way, but one can't build too much on that. He likes his comforts and his luxuries; he would be miserable and insufferable if he had to give up one of them. But they are so unreasoning; they *know* all that; but when they think themselves in love they choose to forget it; only till the mischief is done, and they are married and done for, then they remember all about it. Oh, yes; and the girl is soon enough reminded. No, Mark, I do *not* trust you. As for Madge, I *thought* she had sense enough, but I begin to have misgivings. He is, of course, the dearest boy in the world, and there can only be one opinion as to his looks. And they are thrown so dreadfully together here . . ."

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN DORSET strolled along the stone terrace and wondered how long it was until dressing-time. He was not anxious for his dinner, except as a point to be looked forward to. He liked the country and he liked country houses, but except in the autumn and winter there was not much to do in them.

That was how he got into mischief. His sister had not invited him, but he had been to a brother officer's wedding in the same county, and he had come on here after it. Madge Eccleston had been one of the bridesmaids, and it had been the news that she was going on to Haddon that had decided Mark to go there.

He looked at his watch, and found it was a quarter-past six. He did not see his way to taking more than three-quarters of an hour over his toilet, so there was just an hour on hand to get rid of.

Sir Walter Haddon was certainly writing letters at this hour; perhaps everyone was doing the same. Captain Dorset hated writing letters and the only letter he had received to-day was a reminder from his tailors that they had been honoured of late neither by the commands nor by the remittances of the gallant officer. Next time they wrote he would order a suit of clothes. To-day he could not be bothered.

"If," thought Mark, "Madge Eccleston were here and I were somewhere else, I would not mind writing to *her*;" but that, of course, was an excursion into the ideal. He had no notion of writing to her as it was.

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“ Captain Dorset, what are you thinking of ? ”

The drawing-room windows also opened upon the south terrace, and Miss Eccleston had been reading near one of them.

“ Of you,” the young man replied without hesitation. His manner was not very sentimental, but it suggested satisfaction. In fact, he had begun to dread being bored for a whole hour, and the terror of being bored is the skeleton in the cupboard of the modern young man.

Miss Eccleston laughed.

“ Of course ! ” she said, making room in her corner for Captain Dorset’s evident intention of sitting there too. “ But *what* were you thinking about me ? ”

“ I was regretting,” replied the truthful youth, “ that you were not staying in some other neighbourhood—or that I was not.”

“ A civil regret ! And why ? ”

“ Merely that we might have the pleasure of corresponding. I left my sister up to the girths in letters, and, passing the library windows, got a glimpse of Walter also hard at it. It made me think that I should like writing letters if they were all to you.”

Miss Eccleston declared that this was a specious kind of flattery after all, for correspondence implied absence.

“ Yes. But you *were* absent ; it was only a question of distance. I do not want to write to you *now*.”

The girl laughed.

“ There would, at all events, be very little risk of your letter going astray *en route*,” she observed. “ Don’t you think,” she inquired, “ that it would be nicest out of doors ? It looks lovely down by the lake.”

She had no sort of objection to Captain Dorset’s

company, nor to a *tête-à-tête* with him ; but it struck her that if anyone else were to arrive in the drawing-room, which was an immense apartment, it might seem ridiculous that two people could not find room to sit in it more than fourteen inches apart.

Captain Dorset hinted that he was excellently content as things were ; and, without skipping over his legs, Miss Eccleston could scarcely get out of her corner ; but she did somehow make him understand that she intended to do as she had said.

“ If we sit here twenty minutes,” she told herself, “ he will propose to me.”

And that she did not at present desire. So the gallant warrior’s long legs had to be removed from their position of a barricade, and they strolled leisurely down the broad terrace steps and across the sloping lawn to the little lake.

At the garden end, Haddon Pool, as it is called, is not more than fifty yards wide, and lies between conventional stone banks, but it widens and bends as it gets farther from the castle, and the banks are several hundred yards apart and clothed with copse.

“ Come for a row,” suggests the young man.

“ If you will row,” agrees the girl.

The boat is small, and, as Miss Eccleston observes, rather “ tit-tuppy.” But the lake looks so lovely that she cannot resist it.

He makes her very comfortable in the stern seat, and they glide out into the middle.

“ No ! ” she says. “ Keep nearer in, in case of accidents.”

“ It ’s a great deal deeper, as it happens, along the edge, than out here,” he objects.

“ Never mind. If I am drowned I like being drowned close to shore. Can’t you swim, though ? ”

“ Yes. You need not be afraid. I could swim all

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round the lake with you in my mouth like a retriever," he asserts.

She glances at his mouth as if surprised by a new idea of its proportions, but does not seem much fascinated by the picture.

"My head and my feet would both dangle in the water," she reminds him; "only the small of my back would be left dry."

Again they both laugh. When one is young and good-looking, and in perfect health, it does not take much to make one cackle. Someone else said that. I repeat it.

CHAPTER III.

"I WISH," said Captain Dorset, "that I had. I very nearly did. I wonder what she would have said."

Repentance is the word by which we express our not usually very poignant regrets at the follies we might have omitted but have not. I do not know what is the correct term for the inverse sentiment.

Captain Dorset was suffering from it.

It was about five minutes to eight, and he was not nearly ready for dinner. They had both been disgracefully late, and had sneaked in with guilty haste.

Nevertheless it had been delightful, and he had screwed out of Miss Eccleston a half promise of coming again—by moonlight—after dinner.

"I wonder," he thought, continuing his regrets that he had nothing to repent of, "whether she would have been in a rage or whether she would have liked it. Both, I dare say," he added, thrusting one ample foot into a boat-like pump.

He was a big young man, and his feet were not, as he euphemistically put it, "deformed." He considered it unmanly to have little feet.

When he got downstairs there was, he found, a new arrival. There were in fact two, but the one that mattered was a lady.

He had to take her in: last night he had had Miss Eccleston. To-night Lady Haddon was going to separate them.

He looked round the hall when he got down, and saw that Madge was still in arrears.

"They take such a deuce of a while to dress," he thought, knowing that his sister would be cross. For unpunctuality at Haddon was the sin for which there is no forgiveness.

"Let me introduce my brother, Baroness," observed Lady Haddon. And Captain Dorset made his bow to the new arrival; but he did not catch her name. It sounded German: but the lady was evidently English or American.

Mark was too much preoccupied at the moment by the lateness of Miss Eccleston to give his new friend much attention. He talked to her, but he was not listening to what he said.

As to Miss Eccleston's unpunctuality, he felt all the guilt of an accomplice.

"It is all Mark's fault," declared his sister; "he kept her out on the lake till nearly eight. We may expect her about a quarter to nine."

Sir Walter smiled hungrily. He could not abuse a lady guest; but he was conscious of a vacuum. He despised luncheon, and tea was anathema to him. So he was the mere shell of that which nature is said to "abhor." A quarter-past eight Miss Eccleston appeared, apologetic but serene. Her toilette had not been less careful than usual, and she looked her best. There was no flurry, or bustle, or apprehensiveness about her.

Captain Dorset admired her more than ever.

The other new arrival had to take her in, an elderly young man called "Bible" Cholmeley, because he had a famous Lollard Bible that had belonged to John of Gaunt—not because of any tendency on his part to excessive searching of the Scriptures.

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He was apt to be *en disponibilité*, and Lady Haddon had wired for him from London as follows :—

“ *To Cholmeley, Carlton Club, S.W.*

Come over and help us.

Macedonian, Haddon Castle, Warchester.”

On his arrival she had explained about Mark and Miss Eccleston.

“ Have I got to propose to her, do you mean ? ” he inquired with the intrepidity of a true friend.

“ Well, no. That, I should say, would not be really necessary. But you must be always in the way.”

“ I am *never* in the way ! ” he protested.

“ Indeed no, dear Mr. Cholmeley ; but you must be *fra le piedi* of them both. If you *could* monopolise her a good deal, and *if* the Baroness could flirt with him a good deal, all might yet be well.”

CHAPTER IV.

AT dinner Mark had time to take soundings, and arrive at some decisions concerning the female new arrival. As for Bible Cholmeley, everyone knew him. He was familiar as household words. Indeed, so universally was this elderly young man admitted as the intimate of every upper circle, that a recent variant of his sobriquet was "Family Bible."

But the Baroness was new. Mark had never seen or heard of her.

She was undeniably handsome, and certainly not older than Captain Dorset himself. Lady Haddon was a full half a dozen years senior to her brother.

She betrays, as he told himself, every symptom of wealth and cleverness.

Her jewels were undeniable, and he had never seen anyone so perfectly dressed.

"Is this your first visit to England?" inquired Mark.

"Yes. It has lasted nine-and-twenty years," she answered. "I was born here."

They both laughed.

"My husband's family were Austrians," she said, "but he was an American citizen, and lived all his life out there till we married."

So she was a widow. Though only nine-and-twenty, she was evidently not a recent widow. There was nothing in the least funereal about her delightful dress; and yet, as he noticed, it was all black and lilac.

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As she moved there came the glimmer of diamonds from among the black lace, and her rings were a knight's ransom. He noticed that she carried an enormous fan of tortoise-shell and black lace. As it lay in her lap he noticed that along the outer stick crept a name in large brilliants, surmounted by a coronet, also of good diamonds. He tried to read the name, but could not.

"It is 'Rose,'" she said, laughing out of her extraordinary blue eyes.

He had never seen such eyes. He told himself that they were like an unlimited company, and probably as dangerous. But of their beauty there was no question.

He laughed too, and turned to look straight into the twin depths of cloudy azure.

Miss Eccleston looked across just then, and replied to Bible Cholmeley's inquiry as to which language she liked best for singing, that in her opinion all languages were tiresome to listen to.

"... I mean in singing, of course," she added, not too immediately.

As for Mark, he made no bones about enjoying himself. He would have preferred originally to sit next Madge; as he could not, he piously thanked Heaven that he had something so entirely decorative to sit next to.

"My other name," said the Baroness, "is Von Hagel. It will make you less *distract* if I tell you at once. I saw you didn't catch the name, and if I did not tell you, you would be wondering all the time."

"What's in a name? A Rose by any other name..."

Baroness Von Hagel laughed again; and this time more provokingly.

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"Ah," she said, "I knew that must come. It always does. You are the seven hundred and eighty-fourth young man who has told me that by any other name I should smell as sweet."

"Only seven hundred and eighty-fourth! How few the men you must have met."

"That," said the beautiful lady, "is a little better. You improve rapidly!"

As she turned her head, he noticed how faultless her nose was. A good nose is far rarer than fine eyes.

It was really odd that her name should be Rose; for there was something absolutely like a flower in the texture and the colouring of her dazzling white-pink skin. And an odour, fresh and flower-like, seemed to hang round her like an atmosphere.

Lady Haddon listened sweetly to the County Member's scheme for the sanitation of Puddlemire, but she smiled inwardly as she saw without watching her brother's obvious resignation. With Bible Cholmeley she was less pleased. He was not, she suspected, doing his best. Indeed, he more than once glanced across, more than half anxiously, at Mark.

"That," thought Lady Haddon, "would be unpardonable. If he did such a thing as that, I would never have him inside the house again." But to the County Member she loudly expressed her detestation of the conduct of the man who would not buy the sewage.

When the ladies went away, the County Member poured forth the sewage on Sir Walter and the Rector, who tried to divert some of it towards Mr. Eccleston, Madge's father, and the two young men. But they would none of it, and kept down at their own end of the table pumping one another about the Baroness in stealthy undertones.

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"Have you met her before anywhere? I never heard of her."

"Oh, yes," replied Bible Cholmeley. "I've seen her in London; though she doesn't come to town much, and she was staying in the spring at Farring Dene."

Now, everybody who knows anything of anything, knows that Farring Dene is the head-quarters of the great house of Orpeth; and Captain Dorset was well aware that any guest of the Duke of Shepply was "all right."

"A widow, eh?"

"Yes, she married at eighteen or nineteen, and her husband was drowned the year following. He was a Dutchman."

"No! An Austrian naturalised in America. Rich I should fancy."

"I don't think so. She had the tin, they say."

"Who was she, then?"

"Oh, nobody. Her father was a smallish squire somewhere in Wales, I fancy; and he was always grubbing about on his land for coal, and found it—found enough to found a fortune."

"And with all her money, and all the rest that she has, she has never married again?"

"No; she has buried herself in the country. The Duchess of Shepply met her by a perfect accident, and they took a liking to each other. At Farring Dene she got lots of other invitations, but jumped at none of them."

"I wonder how Pauline got her to come here."

"Told her *you* were coming, I suppose," suggested Mr. Cholmeley.

"Or you," amended the modest Captain.

CHAPTER V.

OLD Jemima Bull, the Rector's spinster sister, was engaged in narrative for the entertainment of the other ladies in the drawing-room. She was a very nice old woman, much devoted to poultry and good works, with a pleasant earthly fondness for novels and short whist.

"It was really a most extraordinary thing," she declared, nailing the County Member's lady. "When his wife was taken he disappeared, and we found him four weeks afterwards in the shrubbery sitting on five lost tennis-balls. The Rector thought it very touching. I cried, Lady Haddon."

The widower in question was a turkey-cock whose helpmate a fox had eaten.

"For my part," objected the Baroness, "I refuse to admire the sagacity of your bird. However blinded by sorrow, he might have convinced himself they were not eggs; and even if they were, the probability was all against his having laid them himself."

"And I," said Miss Eccleston, "am only struck by the intelligence of the tennis-balls, who had no idea of being hatched by a parent so evidently determined to sit upon them."

"Nor," added the County Member's wife, seeing that it behoved her to say something smart, "can one allow one's feelings to be worked upon until one knows the third volume of the story; I have very little doubt that the sentimental widower shortly afterwards married again?"

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Old Jemima, as everyone called her, reluctantly admitted that such was indeed the case ; and in the midst of her defence of his conduct the door opened, and the gentlemen came in.

Captain Dorset found himself near his sister, and began to chat with her ; unfortunately, however, alluding to his lateness at dinner, and foolishly apologising for it.

" It was very naughty of you, Mark. You know how particular Walter is about being in time for dinner. And you might have known that if you ran yourself late you would make the girl much later. I waved to you to come in, but you would not take any notice."

" *Did you see us ?* " inquired the young man anxiously. " I never saw you."

" Yes ; I was watching from the west oriel. I saw *everything*."

" Through a field-glass ? "

His sister nodded ominously.

" Oh, Pauline ! "

He looked much disconcerted ; and was evidently pained by her perfidious espionage.

" I saw you kiss her," she said.

" *Did you ?* " he faltered.

She nodded three times, and each time her head wagged the lady looked more severe and the gentleman more sheepish.

" Do you know ? " he inquired irrelevantly, " the anecdote of the Sunday-school Teacher and the Ingenious Infant ? "

" I know several. If it is one of yours, I am pretty sure to have heard it ! "

" Let that pass," said the young man loftily. " You are *sure* that you saw me ? "

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"Certain!" reiterated the lady.

"Oh, Pauline! and through a field-glass?"

"Through a field-glass."

"Then here beginneth the anecdote. There was a certain Sunday-school, and in it there was a teacher . . ."

"There often is."

". . . And a pupil . . ."

"That also has occurred before."

". . . And the teacher told the infant that the Powers above see everything that takes place. Are you attending, Pauline?"

"Yes, Mark; but I don't want to."

"That," replied her brother sweetly, "is not the point. The infant, hearing this, demanded of the teacher whether the Powers above had beheld him smite his poor little lame sister in their small backyard upon the previous evening. The teacher replied (like you, Pauline, to my queries) in the affirmative, saying, 'that such smiting had been distinctly visible, only with the naked eye.' Whereupon the infant remarked—attend, Pauline—that that was odd, for he'd never had no lame little sister, nor never had no small backyard."

"You mean," laughed Lady Haddon, "that I *didn't* see you kiss her."

"Oh, no, Pauline! I only meant I never did."

Lady Haddon laughed again, and seeing the Baroness close at hand went off to talk to Mr. Eccleston. He was a very young-looking man of fifty with scientific tastes, and divided his time between the study of house-flies, diseases of the throat and knee, and the observation of the criminal procedure of ants. Lady Haddon was wont to say of him that nobody with less than six legs had any interest for him.

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Captain Dorset turned towards the Baroness and told her in a tone of sympathy, just loud enough for Lady Haddon to catch as she moved away, that his sister was suffering from a blister on her tongue.

"She is terribly subject to them," he said; "in all other respects her health on week-days is excellent."

Mr. Cholmeley approached also and took the beautiful lady on the other flank. He began with a question and the Baroness turned to answer it. At Mark's left there was a window open to the ground, and he stepped out of it. At the other end of the drawing-room by another window, also open, stood Miss Eccleston.

He walked quickly to it along the terrace and greeted her from outside.

"Come out," he said, sinking his voice, "it's glorious outside. And Miss Masham's going to sing."

Miss Masham was the County Member's daughter.

Madge laughed.

"It's a powerful argument for flight," she replied, and came out into the broad moonlight of the terrace.

"You promised you would come out in the boat again," he urged. "It will be far more lovely now than by daylight."

"But much more dangerous."

"Yes, *much*," he agreed solemnly, "but not for *you*," he added, laughing.

They strolled leisurely across the dry, dewless turf, and the moon touched all they looked upon with her gleaming silver. The old castle, bowered among its "immemorial elms," lay dozing warmly in the hot night. A smell of incense seemed to come from

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the belt of pines that screened the north bank of the lake. A coot, far away out of sight, called to its mate. There seemed no breeze at all, and yet a stealthy whispering crept among the leafy shadows of the spinny. Neither of them spoke at first; she was listening to the great silence of the night; he was foolishly wondering how he should say what he was determined by the influence of hour and place to say.

The picture of the castle lay unbroken on the cool black breast of the lake until, as they stepped into the little boat, they sent out curling ripples to break it. It shivered, and then mended again, as they glided away to the lonelier end of the winding pool.

The smell of the summer night came delicately from unmeasured distances of wood and field; it breathed about them, soft and rich and sweet. It seemed now as though all things lay in sleep but they two; as if the happy earth and sweet night were all their own.

“ ‘ In such a night,’ ” he quoted . . . And she took it from him.

“ ‘ The moon shines bright. In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise . . . ’ ”

(“ Models of discretion ! ” thought Mark.)

“ ‘ . . . in such a night
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,
And sighed his soul towards the Grecian tents
Where Cressid lay that night.’ ”

The girl trailed her white fingers in the cool, black water.

“ Oh, what would one give to have written that ! ”

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she said, more earnestly, no doubt, than if it had been eleven o'clock in the morning and they had been sitting in the house.

“ I would much rather have been Lorenzo in such a night,” the young man answered, “ than have written it.”

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN DORSET did not row much. He rested on his oars, and watched the girl's fair face, as the moonlight lay softly on it like a veil of gentleness. He wondered why people made the stern seats of these sort of boats so unduly small, and whether, in the event of there being ampler accommodation in the present instance, the young lady would have allowed him to come and avail himself of it. He feared not ; any way, the discussion was purely academical, for there was obviously no room. After all, it was perhaps as well ; for had their united weight been in the extreme stern of this mere cockleshell of a boat it seemed likely that the craft would have assumed the ridiculous posture of a swan searching the bottom of a pond.

Certainly Miss Eccleston was not very far off.

" We 've no business to be out here all on our own hook," she observes presently.

" None whatever," he admits complacently.

" You think so too ? Then let us return at once. Captain Dorset, would you kindly row immediately to the shore ? "

" The coast," he declares gloomily, " is here most dangerous even by daylight ; by night, what with sunken rocks and breakers—(you hear the breakers ?)—and under-tows of various patterns, it is enough to appal the stoutest heart. Our only safety lies in remaining out in the middle of the pond."

They both laugh, and she does not press the question of return. After all, it is not very late.

Round the banks lie broad shadows black and sombre ; out here the lake is a mirror of dusky silver. Somewhere in the belt of shadowed blackness lies a fringe of reeds. Presently a breath comes from the warm fields, and sets them whispering.

"They are telling one another what the queen told them," says the girl, herself almost whispering. "Midas has ass's ears ; can't you hear them ?"

He does not answer, but dips one oar lightly, and almost without sound, into the water ; he wants to move the boat so that the moonshine shall fall more directly on her face. He does not care what frank truths his own face tells ; it is in shadow, he tells himself.

A dog barks—who can tell where ? but somewhere, ever so far off, whence the sound comes mellowed and harmonious.

"It sounds," she says, "a million miles away. And so everything seems ! It is almost frightening ; one seems to be utterly alone."

"Personally," declared the gallant captain, "I must admit that I'm not in the least alarmed."

She laughs ; she makes scarcely any noise. It is, he thinks, as if a flower laughed.

"I meant," she tells him, "that it seems as if the world were empty but for us."

"That would be ripping," he asserts. Only as an afterthought : "It might be well to keep one clergyman alive."

She is rather surprised ; it had not struck her in their brief acquaintance that he was so ecclesiastically minded. She ponders his remark, and decides not to inquire into it.

". . . As a merely temporary measure," he adds.

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And she at once feels that she was right in ignoring the permissive existence of the parson.

Again she stoops over the side and draws her long white fingers through the water. The small noise the plashing water makes sounds clear in the quiet night.

They are both silent. She is so near him, and yet she seems so far ; so separate, so divided.

He knows he should not speak—not speak, that is, what he wants to say ; and yet speech jostles at her portals as if bent on breaking out.

“ How odd it is ! ” the girl says dreamily. “ In all the world there is not one foot of earth that is mine : until I die I shall own no freehold. And yet all the lovely world seems mine.”

He leaves her to say out her happy thoughts, unvexed by interruption. Perhaps her speech is vague, and he scarcely follows her indolently told meaning.

“ A man like the Duke of Shepply,” she says, “ scarcely knows what he owns. Twenty territories belong to him ; but he belongs to none of them. With a score of castles in a dozen counties, one cannot have a real home.”

The young man laughs : not sharp or loudly, but with a sort of large gentleness.

“ I wouldn’t mind,” he says, “ roughing along without a home if I had Farring Dene or Welby ! ”

She shakes her head.

“ Please, understand ! I know what belongs to *him*. But I would rather *belong to myself*.”

He gazes at her as the witching light lies mystic, wonderful, on her fair face, and the silly words break bounds and sally forth.

“ I wish to Heaven,” he begins, “ that you would belong to me ! ”

Her hands drop in her lap ; her eyes meet his and

almost chill him with their cold displeasure : but not quite. It takes a hard frost to freeze a torrent. And the words pour forth with all the vehemence and passion born of the place and hour.

Having in vain tried to stop the beginning, she leans back in her seat rigidly, and lets him speak.

It seems to him she scarcely even listens. In truth she does not listen ; for a pause, for a chance of interruption alone she waits.

Then she speaks.

“ We have known each other *five days*,” she says, “ and perhaps I like you as well as most other people I have known as long. Or I did. I cannot say it has advanced matters that you should suddenly go mad. *Marry you ! Marry you !* You whom I met first on Monday ! And this, what is it ? Friday, is it not ? Why don’t you go in and propose to the Baroness Von Hagel, whom you first met to-night ? That would be more striking still. Now will you kindly row to the landing-steps ? You have certainly given me a fine lesson in discretion ; one sees now why one should not have come out rowing on lakes with strange young men after dinner. Would you mind doing what I ask and rowing straight back ? ”

“ You will not listen ? You will not soften your refusal by any hope or condition ? ”

“ Will you please row in ? ”

“ Will *you* answer my question ? ”

Their eyes met straight in the moonlight, and hers are not more angrily aflame than his.

“ Very well, since you insist,” she replies hardly. “ No, I will not listen. My refusal is straight and plain ; I will not soften it by any ‘ hope,’ as you call it, nor any condition.”

He would give the world to keep her there. Apart

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from any forlorn hope of persuading her, for he has none, he longs to pour out on her a torrent of half-savage invective.

But she has appealed to her helplessness. And no decent man can help obeying when the command is thus put forth by one powerless to enforce obedience.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN the Baroness and Lady Haddon sat down to luncheon on the following morning the table looked sadly shrunk from the night before. There had then been twelve, now there were but four, seated round it.

The parson and his sister had, of course, gone back to the rectory ; the County Member and his wife and daughter had only been what Mark called " Jorrocks' guests." Where they had dined they had slept, and where they had slept there had they also breakfasted, but soon afterwards had driven off in a brougham contemporary with the great statesman after whom it was called.

Mr. Eccleston had also declared, after reading his letters, that he must, after all, not stay over Sunday. So they too had left by the 12.50 train from Haddon Road Station, and the carriage had not yet returned from taking them to it.

Sir Walter, as we know, takes no lunch : that is, he only consumes half a cake and a pint or so of sherry in his study. So the two young men and the two ladies make up the party. Bible Cholmeley is not at his best in the morning ; he is apt to be dull and somewhat sleepy. Neither does Captain Dorset seem as lively a companion as he had been last night at dinner. Perhaps he is a trifle sulky. Or perhaps he has heard that some horse that ought to have done something somewhere has not done it. So says the Baroness to herself.

But Lady Haddon, always the most charming of women, is more delightful even than her wont. *She* is certainly not sulky. She must be the best of sisters, and her sweetness to Mark is really deserving of a better recognition. The young man is distinctly more inclined to snap when his sister strokes him most obviously. He understands her blandness, and resents it. He has made an idiot of himself, and she knows it. She knows also that he has been refused, and her complacence is the daughter of her delight.

As things are, Lady Haddon rather wishes she had not taken the trouble to get Bible Cholmeley down. He was, as it turned out, not necessary. And it is a pity he should have been told. And he is not an easy guest in a small party; he demands attention, and he is not generally amusing when there are only three or four to hear him. His conversation is like the champagne in some houses, "AI" for large parties, gooseberry and acid for half a dozen.

Mark, she admits, is not really behaving amiss. He is, of course, a trifle surly to herself: but that is only because he knows that she knows; and it is obviously disagreeable for another person to be aware when one has received a smart correction. Especially when that person has "taken a line" in the matter. Pauline almost wishes she had not spoken to him yesterday at all. But then, perhaps, he would not have spoken so soon, and had he waited a little most likely Madge would have said "Yes."

Captain Dorset himself knows that he is cross. He is not really quite so cross as he imagines. One's little tempers are never very serious when one is so ready to admit them. Had he been accepted he might possibly have felt depressed.

The modern young man is not usually elated on

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the day following his declaration, whether its reception has been favourable or the reverse. If unfavourable, his *amour-propre* is hurt. If affirmative has been the reply, he is attacked by misgivings. There will be so much to give up. Has he not, perhaps, been too precipitate? Does the dear girl, he wonders, realise how much he is doing for her sake? Does she grasp, *can* a woman grasp, what it means to a man?

But Captain Dorset knows he has been refused; and refused with some special, and, as he thinks, uncalled-for vehemence. Therefore he feels at liberty to consider himself unlucky, and rather hardly used. There will, in his case, be nothing to give up: but he will have to *go without*. He has a right, therefore, to be a trifle surly; not to be so would argue lack of feeling. Nevertheless he is, his sister admits, very civil to the Baroness. It does not matter about his being a wee bit snappish to herself, and if he snubs Cholmeley a little, all the better. Bible Cholmeley, she considers, is apt to get above himself.

On the whole, she wishes that young man would "*get the hump*" and remove himself.

He has darkly alluded, more than once to-day, to the longing of an anonymous duchess for his presence in Scotland. By all means let him go.

"Pauline," says her brother, "the Baroness told me last night she was devoted to riding. Why shouldn't we ride this afternoon?"

"'Why, indeed?' as the infant replied to the parson," said my lady. "Only I don't think I can: I don't feel up to it."

Lady Haddon made a little face, hidden, as she supposed, from Mr. Cholmeley by a begonia growing most naturally out of a silver dragon's mouth.

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The little face meant, " You know he can't ride, and *some* one will have to play with him."

" *But*," she continued aloud, " I want very much to go over to Wilmotes. Lady Hounslow came here the very week we got down from London : and that 's a month, quite a month ago. She will think me the rudest woman in Rentshire. And Wilmotes is so *lovely*, if the Baroness has not seen it. You and she, Mark, could ride over, and I would drive my own ponies, if Mr. Cholmeley would come to bring home the body in case they kill us."

The Baroness would be charmed. As for Mr. Cholmeley, he delighted in afternoon calls in the country, especially when the visit was to a show house, with a Marchioness as hostess. And he rather liked driving ; it was no trouble, and yet it gave one an appetite.

The idea was Mark's, so he is bound to be pleased. But all the same, he thinks a good deal of Madge while he is getting ready.

That young woman has just finished her lunch-basket, and is looking out of her window in the train, her father dozing comfortably in the corner opposite.

" If only he had waited," she thinks. " Why on earth could he not wait ? What idiots men are. As if a girl *could* accept a man on Friday night whom she first met on Monday ! "

The train rushed along, and the fields and trees slipped past. The girl watched them heedlessly, and with a rather dreary expression of her brown eyes. She only half saw them. She seemed, in reality, to be looking down a long perspective of years at an older, more faded presentment of herself.

" Perhaps I shall be an old maid at last," she

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thought, "or perhaps I shall marry an elderly fat widower with four chins and three children, and a red neck that overlaps his collar behind . . . why *couldn't* he have waited? It was simply *insolent* to ask so soon. How *could* one say 'Yes'? What an idiot!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Baroness Von Hagel was wise to like riding. She looked perfect in a habit : and Mark observed how small and beautifully shaped were her feet. Madge, he had noticed, had rather large hands, and had left her feet very much to herself. A girl with big hands who likes to hide her feet is pretty sure to have big ones.

It was also apparent that the Baroness knew all about horses : she rode excellently, and her mount was worthy of her—a tall, showy chestnut, almost thoroughbred, with not a vice within two generations of him, but a whole pedigree of spirit.

They evidently understood each other, and horse and rider felt at home with each other instantly.

When a man rides with a woman it must always increase his pleasure to find that he need have no anxiety for her safety or her comfort. And Mark at once knew that they were going to enjoy a very pleasant time together.

Haddon Castle lies in the heart of the rich Midlands, and for miles around the country is like a park ; virgin pastures that no plough has ever furrowed, and huge trees, beneath whose broad shadows the lazy cattle can find cool comfort even in hottest August.

For two miles they rode through Sir Walter's home park ; then, through a Gothic lodge, passed out into Haddon Chase, a royal demesne, of which

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Sir Walter was Hereditary Keeper and Ranger. Here the trees were sparser, but even older than those in the park ; for the latter dated from the Tudors only, whereas the Chase had been the king's warren since the second William's time. In the park were deer, but in the Chase only white cattle, wild and, as tradition said, indigenous. The "buff bulls of Haddon" had been famous since Chaucer's day, and many a hind and yeoman in former days had been hanged for killing one.

Even now not a horn might fall without a special license from the Crown ; and the creamy hide of every calf or bull that was killed had to be dressed and sent to Windsor.

Mark was always fond of riding in the Chase : there was a glorious sense of space and privacy : two ideas so hard to combine in a little country full of people. The trees were, without exception, oaks : and some were of immense size. Many were of an age so vast that almost any tradition could be believed about them.

"Do you see that little hill over there," he said, pointing with his whip, "and the low gnarled oak upon the top ? That is called the Queen's Oak, and they say it was there that Boadicea was caught and flogged by the Romans."

"And they tied her to that tree ?"

"Don't scoff ! That oak is the daughter (are oaks gentlemen or ladies ?) of the tree that spread itself out to overshadow the insulted queen. It is said to be eleven hundred years old."

They were quite near now. The tree was certainly a strange one : its trunk was not six feet high : its branches lay writhing on the ground like huge tortured snakes.

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"That tree comes very late into leaf; and it is so old that its acorns are all barren. We have sent acorns to all the royal nurseries, but they would none of them sprout."

"Perhaps," suggests the lady, "the royal children ate them."

Mark laughed.

"It's a good thing Walter Haddon doesn't hear your profane jesting. He could not conceive the possibility of a mind so frivolous as to joke about the Queen's Tree in Haddon Chase. He would rather be hereditary keeper, falconer, forester, and ranger than be made a peer."

"And Lady Haddon?"

He laughed again.

"I'm not so sure about her. Being wife of the ranger doesn't prevent her having to follow Lady Fotheringhay in to dinner, and Lady Fotheringhay's father was my father's butler."

"How well those things are remembered!"

"Yes," said Mark honestly. "I dare say we should forget all about it if *our* father had been *her* father's butler."

"But she wouldn't, so it's really all right."

He was quite forgetting that he was out of temper, and in low spirits. His nature was not, perhaps, a very profound one; but it was wholesome and honest. He would soon have forgiven Madge, and only call himself a hound for having worried her. Meanwhile he could not resist the happy influence of the scene and day. The sun was bright and warm, but there was a fresh breeze, cool though not boisterous or strong. The sky was not of the pale and languid grey that goes with great heat, but of the intense Prussian blue that is generally

seen flecked with moving clouds of fleecy white. During the previous night rain had fallen, and even the highways had been refreshed; the hedges were washed, and there were no longer shallow waves of dust for the breeze to lift and scatter.

The broad, cool shadows of the oaks lay black upon the smooth green carpet of the Chase; and here and there, far away, the wild cattle grazed in groups of creamy buff.

Somewhere, high up and out of sight, at heaven's gate or near it, a lark poured down upon the earth her profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

"It's a good day to be alive on," observes Mark. "I always prefer being alive."

"Oh, yes. So do I. The alternative suggests a nasty risk. But on these sort of days one does feel that it's jolly not to have got one's living over. I suppose our grandpapas and grand-mammas felt much the same when they rode out together in Haddon Chase on a summer's afternoon—before grandpapa had asked her to be grandmamma."

She laughs. He evidently does not quite notice the bearing of this remark upon their own position.

"Do you think," she inquires, "that he put it that way?"

"Oh, no. If he had, she would not have seen it. They weren't thinking of their children's children at all."

Captain Dorset was not, like Bible Cholmeley, a professed conversationalist. His thoughts were seldom of national importance, and his expression of them was apt to be down at heel and untidy. But he was not much distressed at this. He did not

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go in for being clever : in fact, he rather "barred" the sort of men who do.

"It's rather a drawback to growing up," he continues presently, "that soon afterwards one begins to grow old."

She turns her head and considers him dispassionately.

"The ravages of age," she says, "are lamentable indeed."

He laughs.

"It is a pity that you are so frivolous. It threatens to be the one blot upon an otherwise faultless character. I am not *at present* very old ; but I am older than I was."

"So am I."

"Really ! I can only say you must have been deuced young formerly : I beg your pardon, extremely young formerly, I mean."

They were an obliging young couple, and they encouraged each other's conceits by laughing pleasantly.

"For my part," she declares, "I should like to remain seven-and-twenty for ever."

"Like Lady Fotheringhay ! She was twenty-seven when I went to Eton, and she will be eight-and-twenty on her next birthday. Bar larks, though, I *am* getting old. I found a grey hair on the top of my head this morning."

"From your description I should say it fell there."

"Oh, no. It grew. It was all in one piece with me."

"Lots of young men of nine-and-twenty," she assures him, "would be very glad to find a hair on the top of their head at all, without troubling about the colour. Evidently this one grey hair marks a

sad day in your life. You must have had a misfortune yesterday."

He grows suddenly red.

"I had," he says quietly. "I was out when you arrived, and never saw you till dinner-time."

All the same, she wonders what he was thinking about.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Baroness Von Hagel and Captain Dorset arrived at Wilmotes, they were informed that the Marchioness of Hounslow was not a Tome ; and to ensure their belief in the statement, it was added that her ladyship had gone to Puddlemire to Hopen a bazaar.

Her ladyship would be back by five, or " anyway " by quarter past. Would not Captain Dorset and the Baroness wait ? The gardings was looking a sight ; in fact they was a sight to look at. And her ladyship so particular said as she oped the Capting always *would* wait.

" Has Lady Haddon been here ? "

No, Lady Addon had not. But perhaps Captain Dorset had rode (this was a bold surmise under the circumstances), and Lady Addon had drove, and it would take longer, hoeing to the I-road being so much longer than the way through the Chase.

They decided to stay, at all events, till the others turned up. Then they would wait for Lady Hounslow, or not, as Lady Haddon might decide.

Tea was offered, but firmly refused by Captain Dorset, and less firmly by the Baroness : an Englishwoman always breaks down at an allusion to tea in the middle of the afternoon.

In a quarter of an hour the pony-carriage arrived. But as it was then only half-past four, Lady Haddon decided not to wait.

Mr. Cholmeley was much disappointed. He said

he had so much wanted to see the famous Reynolds—of Araminta, first Marchioness.

Lady Haddon quite understood that it was the existing Marchioness in the original that the young man really wanted to see : but she at once said—

“ And you shall see it. Would you be so kind as to let this gentleman go with you to the picture gallery ? ” she said, with her invariable sweetness, to the footman.

Bible Cholmeley was disgusted—he would now have to “ tip ” the man—but he had to go. It would have been too barefaced to have refused. He disappeared.

“ Will you also go and look at Pepperminta ? ” inquired the humorous Captain Dorset of the Baroness. But she said “ No.” She hated clanking about in boots and spurs, especially on polished floors.

“ Mark,” said his sister, “ don’t let us go straight home : as we are out, let us do something. Why not go round by Walden, and show the Baroness and Bible Cholmeley dear old Dorney.”

“ Why, certainly. If the Baroness would like it.”

“ Dorney,” said Lady Haddon, “ is our own old home. It is not like Wilmites, of course, or even like Haddon. But it is older than either of them, and there is nowhere a more beautiful specimen of a thirteenth-century fortified manor-house.”

The Baroness said she would of all things like to see it.

“ I shall be far more interested in seeing it than in being shown Wilmites,” she said. “ Longleat and Hatfield and Wilmites are all one to me ; but your friends’ own places are very different. Does it belong to you now, Captain Dorset ? ”

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"Yes. For five years it has been very well let ; but my tenant has succeeded to his own estate, and does not want it any more."

"It is in excellent order, and fully furnished," said Lady Haddon ; "and there is a caretaker and his wife, so we shall get tea. It will be a picnic."

"And it's all in the way home, too ; at least, not two miles out of the way."

So it was settled, and Mr. Cholmeley, who had soon seen enough of the great Sir Joshua, did not keep them long waiting. The quicker he was the less, he thought, could he be expected to give. He hurried so much that he considered sixpence was enough ! For which the footman thanked him aloud, taking care to drop the coin in sight of the party at the door, and to experience, as it seemed, great difficulty in finding it again with the naked eye. Nothing could have been more disconcerting than the assiduous, grateful air of the footman as he packed his benefactor again into the pony-carriage, and Bible Cholmeley drove away quite hoping that he should never be brought to call at Wilmotes again.

Alas ! he was to return in less than half an hour. The riders soon left Lady Haddon and himself behind, and passed from sight. And just as the pony-carriage was waiting at Dorney Lodge for the gates to be opened, the Marchioness of Hounslow came along the road from Puddlemire in her huge landau. She insisted on dearest Lady Haddon and Mr. Cholmeley (whom she was so *charmed* to meet) getting into her carriage and going back to Wilmotes—the pony-carriage might follow slowly.

It was disgusting to be again confronted with that lackey, who now betrayed no sign of recognition. But Bible Cholmeley was not given to losing his head, and he coolly argued that though ultimately the

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lackey might let my lady's maid know about the sixpence, and the maid might divulge it to the Marchioness, nothing of the kind could have happened *yet*. For all practical purposes of the present visit, he might have given the man a bank-note and her ladyship be none the wiser.

CHAPTER X.

DORNEY, as Lady Haddon had said, was not as fine a place as Haddon or Wilmotes, but it challenged comparison with neither. It lay, not in a park, but in a river valley, and, as far as picturesque beauty went, it was unapproachable by either. The road wound along the wooded slope of the glen, sometimes descending to the flat bottom by the crawling stream, where it passed by great boulders, and was often carried across the stream by a beautiful old Gothic arch.

The house itself lay, in a widening of the valley, among old gardens walled and moated, except on the riverside, where the stream was its fence.

The grey castellated mansion, many-gabled and turreted, seemed to lie smiling, but asleep, in the afternoon light. The sadder tone of the limestone was warmed by the yellow tint of lichens, and the parterre in front was a blaze of red and gold.

"And this is yours! *O nimium beatos agricolas si norint!*"

He laughed.

"Yes, it is mine. But my case is at present just as you say, there's *no rint*."

She would not laugh at his abominable and stale pleasantry.

"It is fifty times more beautiful than Haddon," she said. "And yet you never live here?"

"Not since our father died—half a dozen years ago. You see, my stepmother has a big jointure, and

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Pauline has to get her share. So I have to let it, and dwell in the thought that I am Mark Dorset of Dorney."

"And a very comfortable thought too."

"Thoughts don't keep you dry when it rains, or shade you when it's hot," the young man suggests rather dismally.

"If this place was *mine* I would live in it," observes the lady.

"I dare say you would," he replies, grinning irresistibly; "so would I if I were you."

The lady reddens a little, and does not pursue the theme. They have sent away the horses, and he leads her into the old walled garden with its smooth bowling-green and trim box hedges. Round three sides of it stands a procession of chess kings and queens, and knights and pawns, all cut in box: on the third glides the river, silent here between conventional stone banks. The old house seems to lie dozing by its side, blinking comfortably down upon the handsome young man and woman that go strolling lazily over the soft cool turf.

He can see she is delighted, fascinated with the place, and is himself pleased and flattered. He had nothing to do with the making of Dorney; it was all made, just as it now is, centuries before he was born: but he takes her admiration of the place as a compliment to himself.

"Come and see the orange-trees," he says, "they are round here. We have had orange-trees here ever since Charles II.'s time. Sir Guy Dorset's wife, Alicia Androz, came with Catherine of Braganza as a maid of honour, and brought the orange pips in her pocket. We're famous for them: see, they have regular big trunks like little beech-trees."

The trees were really curious, by their rare size and

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evident age. They formed a sort of avenue shading a flagged walk.

"And now," he continued, "come in and see the carved oak and the tapestry."

They retraced their steps to the river-front, and entered by a low tower-gate defended on either side by looped slits through the thickness of the walls for musketry.

"Some say," explained the young Castellan, "that those are later than the building of the tower: others that they were meant first for cross-bow firing."

Crossing a small courtyard paved with cobbles, they went down by two steps into the great hall, a huge vaulted room occupying the whole of one side of an inner and larger quadrangle. Here some splendid suits of armour hung, and the standards of successive lords of the manor, showing the whole pedigree of Dorset alliances.

The walls of this great room were of rough and undressed stone.

A short stone stair led to the oak hall, now the dining-room, and the two drawing-rooms, hung with sombre but perfect gilding.

"There is *more* carving," said Mark, "in other great houses. There is none finer, as far as it goes, anywhere."

Of the tapestry, he told her that it had been brought from the sack of a Flemish city by Gilbert Dorset, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, who had gone as a soldier of fortune and volunteer to the Thirty Years' War.

"And this," cried the Baroness, shaking her head mournfully, "is what you want to let! I wish you would take me for a tenant."

He stood still opposite her, and the yellow sunlight fell on his big, comely body as he answered—

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"On one condition, gladly."

Something in his voice made her hesitate to ask about the condition : but he added—

" . . . that you come as a life-tenant."

The little lady looked up, and with a delightful freedom from embarrassment said quietly, "I perceive, Captain Dorset, that you are proposing to marry me."

"You have," he admitted very handsomely, "quite accurately divined my meaning."

She turned half aside, and sat her dainty small body down in a huge chair of oddly carved oak, black and of immemorial age. No contrast could have shown her off to more wonderful advantage. He came close before her, and looked down admiringly on what he felt was a picture of almost perfect beauty.

"Twenty-four hours ago," began the lady, "I had never seen you : nor you me !"

But though the exordium was not promising, her voice was free from any suggestion of annoyance or offence. She seemed about to state the case with excellent blandness and good temper.

"Of course," said the young man, "I ought to have waited."

Their eyes met, for hers were by no means downcast or afraid of encountering his : and she perceived, with a slight heightening of colour, the obvious sincerity of his admiration.

"Certainly," she agreed, "you might have waited. But if I were a vain woman I might take it as a great flattery that you could not wait."

"I wish you would so take it," he urged simply, "it would be just the truth."

"They say," she pursued, without further disclaimer, "that the sincerest compliment a man can pay a woman is to want to marry her. After all,

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it seems a very reasonable idea, . . . and if that is so, when the man's desire is arrived at after long doubt and cautious hesitation, it would seem that the compliment must be greater when the desire is prompt, and waits the dulness of no reasoned self-questioning."

Again she lifted her face towards his, and the young man noticed, half compunctiously, how honest it was, as well as how beautiful.

"And," she pursued questioningly, "do you really want to marry me?"

"If you will have me," he answered stoutly.

Her eyes dropped, and she sighed gently.

"Captain Dorset," she said, in a voice that was low but very audible, "do you want me to say that I am in love with you, or simply that I will marry you if you ask and wish it?"

"Dear lady," he replied, "how could I expect you to say that you are in love with me? But if you would really marry me (I can scarcely believe it), I would hope that you might at last even love me."

She shook her head.

"It would need no effort to like you: almost already that is so. But a woman's idea of love is of a love which is given once and never taken back; and that love—it is not mine to give. I did give it—long ago: and have never taken it back."

"To your husband?"

She made no verbal answer of assent: but he needed none.

"But," she continued soon, "I cannot for ever be quite alone. For eight desolate years I have borne it, spending them quite alone with my memories of our brief happiness. Perhaps if I were like those great women that we read of I could go on to the end. But I cannot. I am only twenty-nine years old, and

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people live till they are seventy, eighty—ninety sometimes.”

He looked at her with growing admiration and respect ; he had a soft heart, perhaps a soft head. He was easily touched, and the thought of her faithful lonely years moved him strongly.

“ If he loved you as truly as you love him he would not wish it,” he said gently.

She did not deny this. It was, in truth, her thought.

“ And,” she went on, “ I am so rich ! We were always rich, but now I am much richer than we used to be. All these years my wealth has been a reproach to me. It cries out against my inaction, my helplessness to use it.”

To this he said nothing ; indeed, there was nothing that could decently be said by him.

“ If I married you,” she said simply, “ we should be good friends, I think. And then all our wealth would not be idle and good for nothing. I should no longer be alone and helpless. Together we might be useful, and therefore happy. If that will satisfy you, I am ready to agree ; but I am in love with a dead man, and that you must, in bare justice, be warned of, before you make your decision.”

Again she lifted her face to his, and their eyes met frankly. He was so filled with the sense of her beauty, and truth, and faithfulness, that there was room for no other thought.

He took her hand and lifted it, slowly and with a diffident respect, until it barely touched his lips.

“ There is no decision,” he said, “ for me to make. It is only for you.”

She sighed a little.

“ I trust you,” she said, “ and, since you ask it, am willing to marry you.”

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was no announcement of their engagement, and it was suspected by nobody. On the following day, Sunday, Captain Dorset received orders by telegram from his regiment to proceed to Hythe for a course of musketry on Monday, with a number of non-commissioned officers and men. He therefore returned to Warchester that day. And on the day after Baroness Von Hagel also left Haddon.

She had told him that it was her wish that their wedding should be quite private, and be nowhere announced till it had taken place, which might be as soon as he desired. He was quite content to obey, and not even his sister was given any hint. She was well satisfied with the progress they had seemed to make in each other's good graces, and scented nothing further.

It was annoying that Mark should be sent off to Hythe; but Baroness Von Hagel, as Lady Haddon knew, had a country house in Kent, not out of reach. And in answer to a question or hint of his sister's the young man had frankly owned, that if the Baroness was anywhere in his neighbourhood he should be pretty sure to meet her.

They were married early in September, by a special licence, in a small church a mile out of Dover, at an hour that left them just time to drive straight to the Calais boat that leaves at eleven o'clock in the morning. There was neither bride-cake nor wedding-dress, and the sole witnesses were the pew-opener

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and the sexton, monuments of stupidity and dim-sightedness, old and rather depressing.

There was, however, a much more unpleasant circumstance of dismal omen. The parson, almost before arriving at "amazement," "went off," as the pew-opener put it, in a fit. The Baroness was naturally startled, but the sexton begged her to "take no notice."

"'E 'ave 'em constant," explained the pew-opener, "last time 'e were baptising of a hinfant, and he 'd liked to have drowned un. Splosh it went in the font, and my! but there was a to-do an' all."

To the kind ministrations of the sexton and the pew-opener the new-made bride and bridegroom had to leave the unfortunate divine. But their fees had been so handsome that the old man and woman were in the sweetest of tempers. The one thing they could both still see plainly was the difference between a sovereign and a shilling.

As it was, the slight delay of this contretemps had nearly caused them to miss the boat: the train from London had arrived to the moment, and there were very few passengers; and as a consequence the baggage was speedily got on board.

The weather was cool ashore, and on the sea proved chilly. Mark made his wife comfortable, and then began to pace the deck. He was a good enough sailor, but his wife was a better. Presently he went forward and lit a cigarette—a Norman sailor, with an eye to being offered one, coming up and opening a little conversation with him.

Monsieur, the man assured him kindly, need not be apprehensive; the sea would be quite amiable all the way over. Had Monsieur crossed before? Yes? Ah! the English must always be voyaging, The French, on the contrary, expatriate themselves

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never: is it not so? One finds everything in France: one needs not, as the English, to cross the sea in order to enjoy oneself.

The sky was cloudy in the Channel, and a few drops of rain fell. The morning seemed to have lost heart and grown dismal. And Mark felt its chilling influence. He grew bored by the Norman sailor and shook him off rather abruptly. As a rule, he was not apt to be "short" with his inferiors, and now he was annoyed with himself for having snubbed the Frenchman.

He went off to see how his wife was getting on, and found her with her eyes shut, and as he wrongly thought, asleep.

So he resumed his pacing of the deck, though, as he had finished his cigarette, he remained aft in full view of the shelter where she was sitting. His thoughts went back to the unpleasant episode of the parson's sudden illness; and the recollection was certainly depressing. He was not much troubled by superstition, but it was not a cheering omen for a wedding.

And suddenly the thought smote him like a whip stroke, that in marrying the girl who was now his wife he had behaved feebly and amiss. He had made a mistake, and a mistake that nothing could set straight or alter.

For ten minutes the young man was almost helpless under the assault of these misgivings. Then he pulled himself together, and determined to be deaf to them.

"Whether I've married the wrong girl or not, I am married," he thought, "and the thing to do is to make the best of it. It's not a very bad best. She is almost perfect. A thousand times too good for me. More beautiful, yes, certainly more

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beautiful by far than—than the other one . . . who would not envy me? And my business is to forget there ever was any other one: to do all I can to deserve her, and make her life a happy one. And, hang it all, I'll do it. . . ."

He walked back to where she was sitting, and found her eyes were open this time. He did not know it, but she had been watching him for the last quarter of an hour, and she was a woman of fatally keen intuitions; on her too the chill of the clouded sky began to settle.

"You look cold, dear," he said, stooping to draw her wraps about her. And his voice was so kind, and so honest, that her eyes cleared, and she answered cheerily.

CHAPTER XII.

AT Calais they had time for a hurried luncheon, but failed to secure a carriage to themselves for the journey to Paris. It was a large and new first class, and the other occupants were a French officer and his wife, who took two corners, leaving them the other two, so they were not crowded.

The French officer wrapped himself in a cloak with a hood to it, and assumed the appearance of a rakish and rather immature Father Christmas. He very soon composed himself to sleep, but would open one eye from time to time and peep across at the Baroness out of it very appreciatively.

His wife also went to sleep as much as she could, but had to wake up very often to blow up her air-pillow, and pick herself up out of her own lap into which she had tumbled during her unconsciousness. On these occasions her gallant colonel was apt to open both eyes, and fasten them upon her, with a very different expression from that he had bestowed on the Baroness. Their gleam was quite of a small-weed bitterness and intensity.

At Boulogne the poor lady muttered "Bordeaux" in her sleep, as the train jolted itself to a standstill. And her husband muttered "Hein!" through his teeth, as if he would have enjoyed biting her.

The train shook and made a noise. Mark and his wife made very little attempt at conversation. Each looked out of the window, and sometimes glanced across at one another. If their eyes met,

they smiled politely, and he would perhaps inquire if she were tired.

He looked out at the wide, rolling landscape, first sand-dune then treeless corn-land, and through his mind there thudded still, in unison with the thump and joggle of the engine, the thought that he had done wrong. He was by no means without conscience, and he recognised quite directly now the uncomfortable, awkward fact that he was in love with one woman still and had married another.

He was not without conscience, and it behoved him to get over that actual love that did exist, and learn to have that which ought to exist. No doubt, he thought, this would really be effected in time. But in the meanwhile he must be discontented.

As she caught herself watching him his wife always turned her eyes away, angry with herself for spying on his looks. But none the less her troubled eyes would come back to his face again, and she almost knew what was waking in his mind.

She was sorry for him, but angry also. He had not, she thought, been frank with her as she had been with him.

At Abbeville the French lady awoke in a fright, and would with difficulty be persuaded that it was not Paris. At Amiens Mark got his wife some *café au lait* : she was too wise a traveller to want tea at a continental railway station. At Creil an old gentleman came looking for his daughter, to the great resentment of the colonel, who declared that Mademoiselle was not there, as if he had been accused of stealing her. He stood up in his place and patted his breast-pockets as if defying the world to search him.

There were no other incidents of the journey, and at three minutes to five they reached the Nord

terminus. By twenty minutes to six they were in their rooms at the Hôtel Continental, a fine suite *au premier* overlooking the Tuileries gardens.

"The luggage will be brought up almost immediately," Mark declared, "but don't worry about unpacking yet. Have some tea and then rest."

"When do we dine?"

"Not till eight. But I can tell them to have it earlier if you like."

"Oh, no. I would rather not have it before eight. Yes, I'll close with your offer of the tea. But I do not feel inclined to sit still: we've been sitting all day. Let us go for a drive afterwards."

He agreed very readily, and rang to order the tea and the carriage.

"Are you sure you can manage without Jekyll?" he asked. "I wish I had made you bring another maid."

She laughed: his tone was already so marital.

"Certainly I can manage! I could always pack and unpack better than Jekyll. By the way, I heard from her this morning: her father is better. His death never alarms me: he dies annually about this time, but he always gets well when three doctors have given him up. Never before—that would be undignified. Jekyll would not care sixpence for an ordinary month's holiday, but she loves the importance of being telegraphed for, and having to go off in a hurry."

"And she knows nothing of our marriage?"

"Not a word. How astonished she'll be!"

The tea came, but Mark only poured out his wife's, and would have none himself.

"I'll go out on the balcony and smoke a cigarette," he said.

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“ Listen. I ’ve an amendment to propose. You go for a stroll, and I will, after all, rest for quarter of an hour. Then I ’ll pick you up somewhere, and we ’ll dine ! ”

“ Very well. I ’ll go across the Place de la Concorde and into the Champs Élysées. You ’ll find me mooching slowly along, or sitting on a bench, on the right side as you go up to the Arc.”

He disappeared, and gave instructions to the concierge that the carriage was to be announced to Madame in twenty minutes.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARK stood in the Place de la Concorde, and looked for twenty seconds at the dismally pathetic statue of Strasburg, with its ugly but touching wreaths and tributes. Then he went on, over the tragic site of so many executions, and so into the shade of the Élysées.

On a bench, a hundred yards up, sat a figure concerning whose identity he could not be mistaken. To be accurate, there were two figures, but only one of them was known to him. Both were ladies, and both were English: but one was young and one wasn't. The one who wasn't Mark had never seen before: the younger lady was Miss Eccleston.

He had no decision to make as to whether or no it behoved him to speak to her.

She turned her head first, as he caught sight of her, and exclaimed—

“Captain Dorset! Oh, Aunt Carrie, there's Captain Dorset.”

Aunt Carrie had never heard of Captain Dorset, but his arrival seemed so opportune that she smiled most affably, and made ready to become acquainted with excellent goodwill.

The two ladies had just been criticising the trousers and the hat of a passing Frenchman.

“Oh, dear, Aunt Carrie,” the girl had said, “how one longs for a good wholesome Englishman to talk to.”

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"And now," she declares to Mark, "you come dropping down from heaven just as we were getting ready to feel homesick."

He was presented to the elder lady, and made to understand, somehow, by the younger that his former indiscretions were forgiven.

"And what on earth," she inquired, "brings *you* to Paris? It seems to me that people only come here for one of two reasons, either on their honeymoon, or else to buy gowns and bonnets. Do *you* come to Paris for your bonnets, Captain Dorset?"

"And have *you* come on your honeymoon?" he retorts, not without dexterity.

"Not yet," the girl replies hardily; "when I go on my wedding-trip I shall take my bridegroom with me."

"My dear Madge," says the old lady, "what nonsense you are talking."

"That's not nonsense, is it, Captain Dorset?" declares the girl; "it shows a very proper spirit."

They both laugh. And no one notices how constrained his mirth is. Miss Eccleston begins to explain her presence.

It seems that three weeks ago she was summoned to Paris on account of the illness of a godmother. "She was only quite a distant relation, but she was all alone in the world, and I was about as near to her as anybody; and she always liked me, and was very nice to me. Not that we met very often; for, you see, she liked to live over here, and very seldom came to England. Now she's dead, Captain Dorset, and she made me her heir. That's why I'm in mourning."

"Madge!" cried her aunt, much scandalised.

"Aunt Carrie, it's no use being shocked. You

know very well I shouldn't have gone into mourning if she had not left me all her money—even though she had died a dozen times."

"You don't seem to have gone very *far* in," observes the young man critically; "one would not say you mourned as they who are without hope."

"That's what papa says. He came over for the funeral last week. He has a gout attack; that's what we're waiting on for."

The old lady declared that it was rather chilly in the shade, and began to get up steam for departure.

"Would Captain Somerset come to dinner," she inquired, "at eight, at the Hôtel Meyerbeer—close to here in the Élysées?"

Her niece laughed; it seemed to her that the young man looked unduly upset by the havoc in his name. He expressed, however, his regret that he was engaged already.

"Well, come and see us when you can," the girl added; "we shall be another week, I dare say. It's very good of me to want him, Aunt Carrie; the last time we met we quarrelled, and he was ever so tiresome."

Perhaps the old lady was sharper than her juniors imagined, and formed some sort of surmise as to the nature of the quarrel.

"That's your account of it, my dear!" she observed drily. "Perhaps Captain Somerset found you unpleasant also."

"What a ridiculous hypothesis!" exclaimed Miss Eccleston. But, as she held out her hand in farewell, there was some admission in her manner that she might indeed have been also "tiresome."

"If only you had had the sense to wait," her

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eyes declared, " and not been in such indecent haste, the answer might have been different."

Captain Dorset sat down upon the bench that they had just vacated, and his eyes followed them drearily. To him, like the judge in " Maud Müller," it seemed that of all the words of tongue or pen the saddest is, " It might have been."

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTAIN DORSET sat upon the bench, where so recently the two ladies had been seated, on the left side of the Élysées, as one goes towards the Arc de Triomphe: and the expression of his face was dismal, and indeed stern.

He had no intention of meeting Madge again if he could help it; but it was unpleasant to know how necessary such a resolution was.

A man who smokes will probably do so if he is worried or out of gear. Mark pulled out his case and put a cigarette between his lips, but he felt in vain in his pockets for matches. The impossibility of getting a light was certainly an additional grievance at that moment.

“Can I help you?”

The offer was from a gentleman, passing leisurely, who had noticed Mark's dilemma. The gentleman sat down and handed him a match-box. While the cigarette was being lighted the stranger watched the younger man with some amusement.

“You look,” he said whimsically, “rather down on your luck; as if you were just going to be hanged—or perhaps married.”

“I have just been married.”

They both laughed slightly. The elder man was tall and very handsome, but lean and careworn-looking. He might have been thirty-five or thirty-six years old. But his hair was entirely untinged with grey, and his face clean shaven. Both in his

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manners and appearance there was something Eastern—difficult to define or even appreciate, but unmistakable.

He spoke English quite perfectly, but nevertheless with some faint foreign suggestion that puzzled and almost teased one.

For a few minutes the two men chatted desultorily, then a sudden low exclamation from the stranger caused Mark to turn sharply and look at him.

"What is it?" he asked. "You seemed startled."

"I thought," replied the elder man, "that I recognised somebody."

He was looking up the grand avenue in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe, towards the right side of the broad roadway. There were many carriages going each way, and it was not easy to follow the direction of his eyes as he stared among them.

He sighed, and seemed to relinquish the attempt to see again what had caught his attention.

"It was a wonderful likeness," he explained, turning to Mark very courteously, "but it was only for a moment, and after all the distance was considerable."

"You thought you caught sight of an acquaintance?" observed Mark, more out of a polite show of interest than curiosity.

"An acquaintance!"

"A great friend, I see."

The gentleman laughed softly and turned again to Mark.

"It was my wife," he said, "whom I thought I caught sight of."

"Your wife! But surely in that case you could scarcely be mistaken."

The stranger shook his head.

"We have not met," he answered, "for many years. Nevertheless, I believe it was she. There is no other woman in all the world so beautiful."

"Would you mind," asked Mark, "telling me your wife's name. I know it is an odd request."

The dark stranger turned his beautiful eyes full on Mark, and answered without hesitation.

"My wife," he said, "is called the Baroness Ferdinand Von Hagel."

It had never struck Mark previously that his presence of mind was remarkable, but on this occasion his retention of it was really rather singular. With scarcely any pause he took the cigarette from his lips, and said very quietly—

"You may easily have seen the Baroness Von Hagel—I know she is in Paris."

The stranger leapt to his feet, and Mark rose also.

"How can I find her?" cried the elder man. "It would be useless to try and track her now. How can I find where she is staying?"

"One moment," said Mark, "I know the Baroness. In England she is spoken of as a widow."

"I am not surprised. She must for years have believed me dead. I was wrecked, and I alone escaped. By a party of Riff pirates, however, I was picked up and sold into slavery on the Tripoli coast. Thence I was carried to the interior and sold again. My purchaser was fond of me, but cruel beyond all expression: during seven years he treated me well, with two exceptions. Twice I attempted escape and was recaptured; I was then tortured, and given to understand that with each such attempt the tortures would be increased. I was surrounded by spies, and, though the horror of torture could not kill in me the determination to escape, it made me

cautious. Until five months ago my attempts failed. At last I succeeded, but it took me months—alone, hounded, unprovisioned—to reach the coast ; and to-day have I reached Paris, by the night mail, to leave it for England.”

“ You have not written to your wife ? ”

“ No, until the last few days I had no chance. Now I want to *see* her, not to write.”

“ Forgive my saying it,” said Mark quietly, “ but have you thought what such a shock would be ? ”

The Baron admitted that he had not sufficiently considered that.

“ If,” continued Mark, “ you go to Galignani’s they might know her hotel ; meanwhile I will also do my best. Suppose you meet me in an hour at the Hôtel Meurice, perhaps I shall have news for you. If I see her first, may I use my discretion in breaking some hint of this to her ? ”

The man who claimed to be the husband of the Baroness agreed, and there and then they parted. The elder man called a carriage and ordered it to drive to Galignani’s : Mark walked up the avenue a little way and then jumped into another.

“ Drive on slowly towards the Arc de Triomphe,” he said, “ I expect to meet someone coming back.”

It was as he thought ; in a few minutes he met his wife, driving slowly back and peering among the trees on the left side. He dismissed his seedy *fiacre* and joined her in her smart Victoria, ordering the man, rather to her surprise, to return at once to the Hôtel Continental.

It was not easy to begin upon the subject on which he had to speak : very difficult to approach it at all without abruptness. For a few moments he was silent, and his preoccupation was very apparent.

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"I saw someone," she herself began, "as I was driving just now, whom I did not expect at all to see here—someone I know."

He turned sharply towards her, but in an instant he recognised that she could not thus have spoken of seeing the husband whom she had so long believed to be dead.

On her side his start struck her as peculiar. Her remark scarcely, she thought, justified it.

"I saw that Miss Eccleston," she continued, trying not to watch him, "who was staying at Haddon the night I arrived."

"Oh! I saw her too. She was with an aunt—an old maid, I fancy. We had a little talk. It seems a godmother and distant relation of Miss Eccleston's died here lately and has left her a fortune."

"Ah! I noticed the mourning and the high spirits."

To this he made no reply. The tone was, of course, critical, and he disliked it. But he recognised that it was not called for that at this moment he should champion the young lady to his wife.

Presently she turned to him, and said "Mark!" calling him, almost for the first time, by his Christian name.

He turned at once, and their eyes met frankly. His were full of trouble, but it was only the trouble of his sense of the great difficulty of the task he had to perform. He was not at all a coward, even morally; and he delayed only out of the dread of abruptness. He was thinking wholly of her. Nevertheless, he knew that the delay was increasing the difficulty of beginning.

"Mark!" said his wife, "I have been thinking. And so have you, haven't you?"

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"I never make much hand of it," he said, "it's not my line."

He laughed, but it did not seem that his laughter was very light-hearted.

"Do you remember," she asked, "the afternoon that you proposed to me?"

She spoke very gently, as if the remembrance was one she liked: and he replied as gently—

"Yes, dear. I shall always remember that."

They both thought of it. The old tapestried room, the slanting yellow light of the late August afternoon, the happy air of ancient peace about the quaint, old-world scene in which they had said their say, he and she.

"I told you then," she said, "how it was with me. That I was still, and would for ever be, in love with a dead man."

"Yes," he said; he remembered very well.

"But you," she continued, "you said nothing to me of your being also in love."

"No," he answered, not defending himself, "I know I did not."

"But, Mark, I think you were. I think so now; it never struck me then."

He made no denial, and no excuse.

"Why, my dear," she cried, in her low, clear voice, "oh, why did you not tell me?"

"I had asked," he answered, and, as I think, bravely, "and I had been refused."

"The day before?"

"Yes. The very day before."

"Oh, Mark!"

It was their first difference. The strangeness of the position seemed to him so great, that almost all other feeling was swallowed up in the sense of it.

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She was his wife, and she was not his wife. Her sole right to their questions lay in his being, as she thought, her husband. And they had only been married a few hours. He did not challenge her right, or deprecate her judgment. If she was angry, he did not protest against her anger, or silence her by the crushing statement of the truth.

He had deserved the correction, and he took it mildly—without even kissing the rod !

They came to the hotel.

She preceded him upstairs to their rooms. He lingered behind and bade the carriage wait. He asked also that his account might be prepared, explaining that, most unexpectedly, both he and Madame had to leave. He made them understand that there would be no discussion as to the amount ; and seeing that, and that Monsieur was evidently troubled, they met him fairly. Even hotel-keepers are not all bandits. Having made these arrangements, he followed his wife upstairs, still thinking wholly of her, and yet feeling that he would give much to be spared this interview.

Oddly enough, he never for a moment doubted that the other man was, in truth, her husband.

CHAPTER XV.

HE found his wife in their sitting-room, out of which, on one side, opened their private dining-room ; on the other their bedroom, beyond which was his own dressing-room.

She was standing by one of the open windows looking out into the gardens of the Tuileries opposite.

Half an hour had already gone by since he had parted from Von Hagel ; in another half-hour he must meet him at the Hôtel Meurice. As he entered she turned to meet him, and he saw at once that there was to be no further allusion to his offence. It had been, the girl thought, their first matrimonial discussion—and it was over : perhaps it might be their last.

“ Oh, Mark ! ” she said, “ you look so grave. Was I nasty ? I did not mean to be.”

“ No, dear,” he answered gently, “ you could not be nasty.”

She held out her hands to him, and he took hers with a grave cordiality.

She seemed so small and weak ! And he was so huge and strong. He could not guess how great the shock might be of what he had to tell. But, after all—time pressed so—he was almost forced to be abrupt.

“ My dear,” he said, “ do not think, just now, about me at all. There is something concerning yourself that I have to tell you.”

She scanned his face with doubting wonder.

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"But does it not concern you too?" she asks.

"Yes, but for me it is different. I am a man, and we do not feel things like you."

"What is it?" she almost whispers, half-scared by the anxious gravity of his face.

"It is nothing bad," he answers, "for you a great joy. But for me scarcely that."

He smiled rather sadly, she thought.

"Oh, Mark!" she whispers, "are not our joys to be the same?"

He shakes his head.

"In this," he says, "they cannot be. And even for you the joy must come as a great shock."

He does not take his eyes from her startled face, nor can she do anything but search his for the meaning of his riddles. He feels her tremble a little, and knows that she is leaning on him for support.

"Oh!" she cries, "what is it? Tell me, Mark. It frightens me to see you look so grave, and understand nothing."

He is in desperation: the time is hurrying on, and she seems to have no inkling.

"My dear," he says, himself shaking, "you must be told——"

Still he can scarcely tell her. Then he does.

"Your husband," he says in a strained, low voice, "your husband is alive."

She is quite dazed.

"My husband! *You* are my husband," she stammers.

He still holds her hands, and feels how they tremble. He shakes his head gently.

"You . . . you mean," and the words will scarcely come through the quivering gate of speech, "you mean *that Rudolph is alive?*"

“ Yes,” he says, “ he is, I believe, alive. And I have seen him : he is here—in Paris.”

“ But,” she cries, as if she dreaded that he was deceiving her, “ he died. He was drowned. They identified his body.”

Mark shakes his head, and still she clings to his strong support, her whole body—the whole of it he feels, so small, so frail—shivering as if in fever.

Then, very slowly and softly, as if to a child who has been ill and must be told everything very simply and gradually, he told her what he had himself been told. And as she listened she became calm, and a strange, almost unearthly light of rapture grew in her great eyes. It gave him a sort of pang. He knew that the pang was unreasonable, but he knew that it was there. After all, he had thought of her all day as his wife. And ever since he had known her he had appreciated her. Not all his being in love with Madge had ever blinded him to the greater sweetness, more wonderful beauty, of this girl who had been for a few hours his wife.

Then he told her his plan.

“ I meet him,” he said, “ at half-past seven at the Hôtel Meurice, where I shall take my things. Yours you will take to the Hôtel Bristol. I will send him there to you, or bring him rather. For though, somehow, I have no doubt, there is the *possibility* of doubt. If *you* doubt after seeing him then you need me, and I am yours for every need. If you have no doubt, and recognise him as—as himself—then it must be for you to decide whether he should be told anything of our marriage or not. My own feeling would be to tell him nothing yet, later if you like. But remember that no one in all the world really knows of our marriage. It has not been registered, owing to the parson’s illness ; the only witnesses

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were that old man and woman, half blind and wholly stupid, who only saw us that once in the dark church. As for the parson, he saw me twice, and you once. Nor is he ever likely to meet either of us again."

" You have sent no notice to the papers ? "

" Not yet. I have it in my pocket now."

CHAPTER XVI.

"AND now," said Mark, "we must say good-bye. For it is time that you should go. I heard them take your things down. You will find them on the carriage we were driving in just now. Drive at once to the Hôtel Bristol, and take rooms there. I am so sorry I cannot save you the trouble of doing it for yourself. Have your luggage taken up at once, and then have your dinner. Before you have finished we shall be there too."

"What was he like?" she asks irrelevantly and for the twentieth time.

At each word of Mark's she knows more surely that the wonderful news is true.

"Good-bye," she says presently, "we shall always be dear friends."

"Always dear friends," he answers, "but friends who are apart."

She made some gesture of question, and he said that it even must be so.

"After all," he tells her, "you have been my wife to-day, and I have been your husband. Any other *intercourse* of friendship would for us two be grotesque henceforward, and unseemly. Nor," he adds sincerely, "should I like to meet you and *see* you as the wife of another man."

She feels that he speaks wisely and with a singular apprehension of the truth. It is odd, but she knows that she should not care either to *see* him married to another woman.

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"And yet," she says, "you *will* marry—and be happy."

He offers no heroic denial.

"Oh, yes," he admits, "I shall marry, and be happy. I am one of those men who are bound to be happy and bound to be married."

"And I think," she tells him, "that you would make any woman happy."

She tries not to think of any particular woman—she certainly will not think of Miss Eccleston. A ridiculous jealousy of that young woman assails her, and she knows it.

For a moment they are both silent, then he takes her hand again, for it is time that she should go.

"God's providence," he says gravely, "is a strange thing: a strange but true thing. I am not much of a religious man, but I *know* that. All these years it has guarded *him*;" she knew that he meant her husband; "and it has been with us too."

He is first to turn towards the door: he opens it for her, and stands holding it as she passes out. The room has no signs of their brief occupation; it has rather a forlorn look, he thinks. The door into the dining-room is open, and they can see the smart table, with its plate and glass and flowers, set out for their first conjugal repast.

They pass down the broad, shallow stairs—it is not worth while to descend by the lift: and he places her in the waiting carriage. Here they make no farewells, she leans forward and herself directs the driver. And she is gone, their honeymoon is over; and Mark stands a widowed bachelor upon the steps of the hotel watching her as she goes.

He sighs a little as he turns away. The ending of

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a dream has always a certain wistfulness, albeit the awakening is to a reality as happy.

Another carriage loaded with his luggage stands waiting. He pays the account they have prepared, and distributes generous gratuities. Then he too departs.

But for the baggage it would be absurd to drive to the Hôtel Meurice, it is so near. He is there almost immediately.

He jumps down and goes straight in, having paid the *cocher*. He engages rooms and bids them have his baggage taken up. Then he goes at once into the *salle à manger* and sits down at a small table. They bring him soup, and he then says that he expects a gentleman. In a few minutes the gentleman is shown in : it appears that the gentleman was waiting in the *fumoir*.

This he has done intentionally to gain a little more time.

“ Well,” he says, “ could Galignani help you ? ”

“ No. They were horribly busy and not very attentive at first : they evidently did not think it at all an important matter, and I did not care to be too explicit. At last they found time to attend to me, and did what they could.”

“ But to no purpose ? ”

“ To no purpose. They seemed to be telephoning to half the hotels and *pensions* in Paris.”

“ Baroness Von Hagel would not be at a *pension*,” observed Mark.

“ No, I expect not. But, you see, after eight years in the heart of Tripoli one’s ideas of polite customs might get antiquated. What’s all wrong one year gets all right the next. So I let them go their own way to work. But it led to nothing.”

He had taken a seat, in a temporary sort of way,

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sitting sideways on it with his hat and stick in his hand. Meanwhile Mark had finished his soup and a little fish.

He poured out some wine and pushed it towards Von Hagel, who took it carelessly without any acknowledgment, and drank it as if he was not thinking of it at all.

Mark himself drank some and said—

“Well! I have been more fortunate: I have seen her.”

“It was her that I saw? I felt *sure* I was not mistaken.”

“No, I do not think you were mistaken. I met her almost immediately after you had gone away: and made her stop and let me get into her carriage. I drove with her to her hotel, and have prepared her mind for your coming. You will find her at the Hôtel Bristol.”

Baron Von Hagel jumped up.

“And why are we gossiping here?” he exclaimed. “Come, let us go at once.”

Mark also rose, but more deliberately.

“To tell the truth,” he replied, “I have kept you here these few moments intentionally. It is scarcely half an hour since I left the Baroness. I told her I was going to meet you and bring you to her. Meanwhile, I begged her to take some refreshment. She only crossed over from England to-day, and must be fatigued by her journey, apart from this great shock—for you know it must be a shock, however full of joy so enormous a surprise may be. It was her very recent arrival that prevented Galignani’s knowing her whereabouts; by to-morrow he could certainly have told you.”

CHAPTER XVII.

IF Mark had before felt any doubts as to the genuineness of the *soi-disant* Baron Von Hagel's claims, they would have vanished the moment he saw that man of strange adventures and his supposed widow meet. As a matter of fact, he had had none.

Truth is often oddly convincing, and from the first the young man had felt himself to be in the presence of facts which no mere discussion of probabilities or unlikelihoods would shake or alter.

His own position, of course, was the most peculiar conceivable. He had quite legally married a lady who was legally quite free to marry. But, more than that, she had felt herself, believed herself, to be equally free as regards the sanction of divine law also.

And now it was discovered, within half a dozen hours of their marriage, that the lady was not a widow; and therefore that their marriage, legal or not, could be none in the eye of Heaven. And the husband, thus given back by death, was not the more unwelcome one returned, as Ulysses said, "like ghosts to trouble joy."

He had been her one and only lover.

Meanwhile their marriage, by the merest chance unregistered, had had so few witnesses, and of such a character, that it was in the greatest possible degree unlikely that it would ever be known to have taken place, except by their own avowal.

All this was very present to the mind of the young

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man as he walked beside Von Hagel on their way to the Hôtel Bristol.

"Yes," the concierge admitted, "the Baroness Von Hagel had descended *chez nous*. Did these gentlemen wish to see Madame?"

They were escorted to her apartments—again a fine suite on the first floor.

In the outer *salon* their conductor left them, passing through a very small anteroom to the little *salle à manger* of the suite where, he thought, Madame *était à table*.

In a few moments he returned. Yes, Madame la Baronne would receive these gentlemen. Would they be seated? He placed chairs, altered the blinds a little, and withdrew.

He had scarcely disappeared when the Baroness came in.

She was very pale, which altered her singularly. And Mark noticed that her slight frame trembled so much that she could scarcely stand.

But she had scarcely let her earnest gaze rest upon the man whom she had long mourned as dead, when all this was changed. A lovely flush swept away the pallor of her face and throat, a glistening moisture, that was all of happiness, filled her wondrous eyes, and the lips parted in a smile that told of long grief, and of such a joy as we mortals only know as the revulsion from long grief and pain!

Mark stood on the balcony, his hands leant upon the marble, his eyes bent upon the street; but they had no heed of the passing to and fro of the city's busy traffic. They were full of that meeting he had just seen: and his mind was entangled with it.

Was it not possible without such previous sorrow

to know such unmeasured gladness? Must earthly happiness be always the removal or the mere absence of suffering?

Presently she herself came out on to the balcony, and stood beside him in the gathering dusk.

He turned and looked down upon her happy face, half-grudgingly; never, he knew, though they had been wedded half a life-time, would his coming have lighted in her eyes the lamp that burned there now.

She stood beside him silent, and yet half wondering at his silence.

"Good-bye," he said at last.

And she knew that there could only now remain farewells.

He took her hand and lifted it until his lips touched it.

"This," he said, "is all you ever meant to give me. And now I give it back. But always it will have been an honour that for any time at all it should have been mine."

He released it very gently, almost as if he feared it might fall and break, it seemed so small and fragile.

And so he left her, passing into the room where her husband waited for him to say farewell.

"Good-bye," the elder man said heartily, "you have helped me very much. It was a great good fortune that I met you."

"Yes," replied the other, "it was very fortunate."

Perhaps something in the young man's face arrested the Austrian's attention.

"Perhaps," he said drily, "you have less reason to rejoice at our meeting than I have."

"I am very glad indeed we met. It was a singular good fortune," Mark answered quietly.

They were out on the staircase now, Von Hagel seeing his guest off. He laughed a little.

"I thought, perhaps," he said, "my resurrection might have spoiled wishes of your own."

"You forget," said Mark a little grimly, "that I told you I had just got married."

"Ah! So you did! and I am keeping you from your bride. Good-bye, good-bye; hurry off to her, and make her all my apologies for keeping you so long from her."

"Good-bye," said Mark, still smiling grimly; and so he went, without, however, promising to deliver the Baron's messages to his wife.

and looked at her from under the brim of a straw hat that was also tilted, and rested at this moment on his nose.

"Shall we go up and speak to him?" inquired the Baron. "It's your friend Dorset, isn't it?"

The Baroness said that there was no necessity to interrupt them.

"He looked awfully down the time I saw him first," said Von Hagel; "he said it was his wedding-day, and I am sure he was repenting at leisure . . . but he looks pretty well reconciled now, doesn't he?"

"He certainly appears reconciled to his destiny now," repeated the Baroness, in a less complacent tone than might have been expected.

A Self-contained Residence.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT took Mr. Marling's fancy was the above description. Houses in their own park-like grounds—of nearly an acre and a quarter—presented nothing novel, and certainly nothing arresting, to the imagination, though Mr. Marling's imagination had ever been one of his most active characteristics. The three laburnums, or as many pink may-trees, the two wellingtonias, one arancaria and half a copper-beech instantly rose before his horrified fancy, together with the painted entrance-gate bearing the name of the residence—Sandringham, perhaps, or Ladysmith.

He had learned what to expect of a grange, and even a manor-house could no longer deceive him. Castles, indeed, are infrequent in the lists of house and estate agents, but halls he had found very unreliable, especially in the Eastern Counties. Courts, too, on actual acquaintance, had often proved remarkably uncourtly in appearance and demeanour.

But a self-contained residence! Why, here at last was something original. (Mr. Marling had never been house-hunting in Scotland, where a

self-contained residence is not more unusual than a lady or gentleman of the same character.)

Mr. Marling at once resolved to inspect it ; and though it was as near the Arctic Circle as one can get in England, thirty miles or more on the polar side of Newcastle (" a place quite northward," as even Mr. Bennet was aware), he had no objections ; for proximity to London was no attraction to him, and in no particular county had Mr. Marling fewer acquaintances than in any other. It was a harmless idiosyncrasy of his to believe that he possessed no acquaintance anywhere, and only a few friends whom he had always been accustomed to think of as a long way off. Unsited to promiscuous sociability, Mr. Marling was inclined to plume himself on being a misanthrope, whereas he was merely rather a shy man, with too much originality, or at all events independence of behaviour, to get on well with everybody. He went down to Newcastle, and changed there into a local train which carried him nearer and nearer to the Scottish border. At a small market-town called Horspeth he passed the night in an old-fashioned and very comfortable inn, whence on the morrow he drove over to have his first look at the self-contained residence.

The description proved in every way applicable. To state that the house was detached would feebly convey the idea of its determined isolation ; and its grounds, extensive as they were, were secluded (from a public which had no existence) within enormously high walls of ancient brickwork, coped and buttressed with stone. The mansion was rather large, and though several of the tall windows had been built up in the days of the window-tax, quite enough remained. But they conveyed the singular

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impression of eyes that have exclusively an outward look. No doubt they admitted light enough, but nothing could be seen through them by the spectator out of doors. Their object was to let in something, but to let out nothing.

Nothing could be more reticent than the air of this thoroughly eligible mansion. Mr. Marling, who was fanciful, felt himself instantly reminded of Steerforth's respectable servant, Mr. Littimer. The house was just as respectable, and conveyed exactly the same impression of resolute non-committal. If its master had a secret, like Mr. Littimer it would keep it. Its very neatness, and for an unoccupied house that had been unlet for several years its neatness was surprising; its very neatness, I say, seemed a part of its grim determination to express nothing, hint nothing, admit nothing.

"Such an excellent house as it seems," observed Mr. Marling to the caretaker, "it is a wonder no one has taken it!"

"Indeed," said the caretaker; but whether she meant "A marvel indeed!" or "Indeed, do you think so?" not even Mr. Marling, who was a judge of voices, and quick at detecting shades of intonation, could in the least determine. The woman certainly possessed a voice, but had apparently disencumbered herself of anything like intonation. Her name, he subsequently learned, was Mrs. Filmer, but for his part he chose to believe her the relict of Mr. Littimer aforesaid.

She seemed to have been built out of the same materials as the house, and, like it, was large enough and perfectly eligible (for anyone bold enough to take her), and not at all out of repair or neglected. But she was not a bit more confidential.

She no doubt showed the rooms—on their own

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responsibility, so to speak, and did not appear to decline answering questions. But her replies never conveyed anything (so Mr. Marling fancifully assured himself), and her affirmatives gave just as nugatory an impression as her negatives. She had no apparent objection to his coming to see the house, and would apparently have none to his taking it, or to his going out into the shrubbery and hanging himself.

The mansion was fully furnished, and the furniture was good and well-kept. It looked as new as it could ever have looked, and seemed determined never to look any older—like Mrs. Filmer, who could never have been young, and in fifty years' time would undoubtedly refuse to seem old.

It was probably quite comfortable furniture, but had firmly resolved not to betray anything of the sort, or to frankly declare itself uncomfortable either. The beds certainly had a lethargic expression, and one could readily suppose people had gone to sleep in them; but that anyone had ever woke up in them even Mr. Marling, with his active fancy, found it impossible to imagine. The beds were, Mr. Marling assured himself, the only unobservant-looking objects about the place. Just as the outward aspect of the house itself suggested coolly vigilant observation, just as Mrs. Filmer seemed the solid embodiment of the same idea, so every polished mahogany door-panel, or shining walnut card-table, or reflective rose-wood sideboard fascinated Mr. Marling by its air of stolid, incurious watchfulness. There was nothing inquisitive about Mrs. Filmer: the notion of inquisitiveness was too personal and human for association with so impersonal a female. She was merely observant: with the stolid, immovable observation of a

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chameleon, that turns his head the other way and watches you all the while.

So did the furniture. It never blinked as ordinary furniture does in the fire or sunlight ; it merely stared. There was no alert glance in its polished surfaces, only the stationary, vigilant noting of an immovable sentinel.

Of course, Mr. Marling took the house : its material excellence and its ethical peculiarity alike marked him down its victim. The opportunity of studying so remarkable a character as Mrs. Filmer's and the mansion's (one, really, and inseparable) was a thing beyond his power to resist. Mrs. Filmer, indeed, showed from the first that she knew he would take it. No doubt she answered his questions as to the drains and the water, the number of bedrooms, and the aspect of the sitting-rooms, but it was obvious that she was entirely aware that they were all irrelevant.

Had there been forty bedrooms instead of eleven, had the reception-rooms all looked north-east instead of south-west, she knew very well that Mr. Marling could not help taking the house. It was not that she wanted him to take it ; it was obviously indifferent to her whether anyone took it, or nobody took it, or an earthquake swallowed it up bodily, once she had herself locked and quitted the premises.

Mrs. Filmer was taken on with the mansion as housekeeper. Mr. Marling could not deny the apparent probability of his having proposed the arrangement to her, or of her having proposed it to him. He could only aver that he had not the faintest recollection of either. Mrs. Filmer, he declared, had merely taken it for granted that she would remain as housekeeper, just as he could not

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help knowing, the moment he entered the house, that she had taken it for granted he would become its tenant. She took everything for granted—the hours of his meals (which were not those to which he had been accustomed), their bill of fare, his hour of rising in the morning. It was with relief he found himself allowed to fix his own time for going to bed, or rather to leave it unfixed, and sit up or retire betimes as varying fancy led him.

Mrs. Filmer herself he believed to go to bed rather early, though as a matter of fact he knew nothing about it. She sent him his dinner at seven, during which repast he was waited upon by a sort of cheaper, more recent family edition of Mrs Filmer called Ida or Eider (he had never seen it written, but from her downy manner he thought the latter spelling more suitable), popularly supposed by himself to be a niece of the housekeeper's. At a quarter to nine that lady herself appeared with whisky decanter, tumbler, hot water and syphon, all of which she had taken for granted, without any order on his part, and was subsequently seen no more till the morrow.

At seven she brought him to his bedside a cup of excellent tea, but so inexorably, that had it been poison instead, Mr. Marling knew very well that he would have had to drink it. He hoped she would not take it for granted presently that he and she had better get married, for in such a case he frankly admitted to himself that nothing could save him. His sheet-anchor was the ungrounded conviction that Mr. Filmer—or Mr. Littimer, as he preferred to call him—was still extant, though not apparent.

CHAPTER II.

FOR the first week it rained without cessation all day, clearing up ridiculously at nightfall, just when it would have been reasonable to begin to rain. Mr. Marling disliked getting wet as much as a cat, and remained contentedly indoors: his habits were not active, and this was no penance to him. He had plenty of books (but they were, he found, all about Mrs. Filmer), and his housekeeper kept up excellent fires.

After the rain came fogs, and for another week he remained indoors. At the end of the fortnight a frost set in, black and hard, and Mr. Marling decided that to go abroad while it lasted would be unsafe. "I don't know the country," he thought, "and might trip up over the North Pole, or tumble into it, or prick myself with it. I haven't an idea what it is like, whether it's a cavity or an excrescence, liquid or solid, blunt or sharp."

So he remained indoors, writing a few letters, reading a few books, but thinking all the while of Mrs. Filmer.

And all this while he saw no one. Except a farmer or two, there were no laymen to come to call; and tenants of the self-contained residence were considered to move on a plane above their reach. True, each village had its parson, and perhaps half a dozen villages were within as many miles; but Mr. Marling had not been to church, and even the nearest of them had no official cognisance of his

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arrival. He did not complain, for he rather disliked clergymen, and on the whole was disposed to believe himself an agnostic.

About a month after his arrival, however, it happened that the sun, in an unguarded moment, began to shine, and Mrs. Filmer shortly took it for granted that he would be going out for a walk. Perhaps she thought it time to "turn out" his library, though she certainly did not say so, and like every other room in the house, it seemed both cleanness and neatness itself; but she did bring him a glass of port and three biscuits, and undoubtedly she caused him to understand that this would carry him on till lunchtime at two; and the fact is indisputable that by eleven o'clock he was outside the high walls of his own domain, and walking down the road that had originally brought him from Horspeth.

The sensation was peculiar. Mr. Marling had become, as it were, so absorbed in his self-contained residence that it was already almost an adventure to be away from it. He felt it so strange to be outside that he did not think he should stay long. It was really with a sense of nervousness that he wondered if he should meet anyone. And it was certain he could meet no one known to himself, or to whom he was known.

It was a pleasant morning, mild, silent, soundless, with a soft air, motionless as death, a sunlight that held no heat, sexless, utterly unreminiscent of the lusty sun of summer, with his ardent kisses, his fierce love-touches. The trees were quite leafless. In the narrow belt of wood beside the road a golden-russet carpet was still spread, and the smell of it beat upon his memory with stings of association.

He had been young once, with high hopes and

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high ambitions. He had no ambitions left, and hope was impossible, for he had got already all he intended to want. Quite unexpectedly he had become, ten years ago, rather rich. And that advent of unearned wealth had gradually, but quickly, spoiled his life, emasculating it. He had little by little abdicated all his claims on life, exchanging each once eager desire for present indolent comfort and indulgence, and with all the less struggle that no indulgence of his was illicit or degrading, or injurious. He had relinquished effort as supererogatory: attainment of all sorts he had ceased to look up at, having acquired the wretched habit of pricing the thing to be attained, and counting cost with the trouble of acquisition.

Out of doors on this lovely morning Mr. Marling found himself uncomfortable: not physically, but morally. There was an accusation in the beauty of the wintry world that threatened to annoy him. The swiftly-dying year smiled, not wistfully, because, unable to effect more, she had done all that had been appointed or possible. Her abandonment of further effort because energy could no longer be effectual, and nothing remained for action to accomplish, was the contrary and reproach of his own abdication of endeavour at an age when he ought to have been still a young man. At eight-and-thirty Mr. Marling was, as he knew, in reality elderly.

So disagreeable did he find the unwonted callings of memory and reproachful glances of retreating purpose, that he turned homeward as soon as he deemed it late enough for Mrs. Filmer to take his return for granted. But, as he turned, something peculiar took place: the road in front ran straight for half a mile—it was that straight stretch, without a turning, that had decided him against further

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advance—and some way on, too distant for recognition of feature, he observed a gentleman. The figure was strongly familiar: he had known it, through its varying development, all his life, and yet at the moment it evaded recollection and identification; and just as he resolved to go no farther, the gentleman turned too. He made a gesture—if he spoke, no sound reached Mr. Marling—and it was one of very simple import. He beckoned to come on.

But Mr. Marling was out of humour with the fine wintry morning; its sunshine, he decided, was pharisaical and provoking; and such signals to increase the distance from his self-contained residence as were given by the beckoning gentleman were unwelcome and inopportune.

He stood still indeed, without immediately acting on his resolve to turn homewards, but without moving forward either. The point he had reached was at the beginning of a long incline, straight, resolutely upward. Mr. Marling had long ceased to enjoy walking uphill.

He watched the gentleman ahead (who walked faster than he cared about), but with very little hesitation as to not following him. And presently the stranger, if he were a stranger, turned once more. Pointing forwards, up the steep, straight road, he beckoned again, and beckoned insistently. Mr. Marling giving no sign of obedience he added a gesture of displeasure and of disappointment, and vanished absolutely.

It seemed so impossible, the road was so straight, that Mr. Marling was startled. For some time he looked earnestly, but the stranger (whose appearance was not at all strange to him) did not reappear, nor did anything else occur to account for his having vanished.

Mr. Marling did at length really turn homewards, but the exquisite beauty of the wintry day had become even more uneasy to him, its reproach was more explicit. Arrived within his own high-walled grounds, problematic from without as those of a convent, he felt more himself—the recent self to whom the idea of a self-contained residence had appealed with such attraction. And as he drew nearer the house the contrary appeal of the day outside, the winter sunshine and the open country, weakened, and was easier to repell.

But here another strange thing was to happen. Just as he had almost succeeded in forgetting the reproach of the woodland smell, with its burden of association, its linking to the days “when he remembered to have been joyful and free from blame;” just as he was assuring himself that, once indoors, he would remain there, the very door to which he was hastening opened—or he supposed so, for on the threshold, facing him, was the same figure that had disappeared just now. But was it quite the same? Was not this figure more youthful, more alert? Was not its mien and significance all more pregnant with adolescent vigour, courage, movement?

Anyway, it was nearer, and the features as well as the form were clearly recognisable. In spite of himself, he stood still; in spite of himself, a weird emotion chilled him. No figure could be more familiar, no features could once have been better known to him, though both were now out of date—obsolete.

Had he had a younger brother this should have been he; but he had been an only child, and no relation had ever much resembled him.

The figure on the doorstep lifted a warning hand,

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not to beckon now, but to forbid his entrance. He moved forward till the expression on the other's face was as obvious as his gesture.

"Go hence," both said. "Inhabit here no more."

But Mr. Marling, though fanciful, was practical—as the fanciful oftenest are—and he moved forward with scarcely a pause, keeping, however, an earnest watch on the figure that had once been so familiar. With a pang he noted how straight it was, how upright, that it seemed taller than he was now; it certainly was slimmer, more active, and the face was undoubtedly more attractive. He noted, wistfully, excellences that had ceased from his looking-glass, though until now he had never missed them. The eyes were steadier, the skin clearer; the lines all cleaner, more definite. The lips had a kindlier firmness, that was neither hard nor feeble; irregular as all the features might be, sanguine faith and purpose gave them unity.

Nevertheless, to himself there was reproach in the face that had once been his own: was there, conditionally, encouragement too? The gesture was not warning only, but reproofing. On the threshold of the self-contained house the figure of his earlier, better self stood forbidding his entrance, forbidding with a menace.

But Mr. Marling moved forward.

When he had come within twenty paces, or less, of the door it did veritably open, and Mrs. Filmer came out. For a moment the two figures were side by side upon the doorstep, one as actual as the other. Then, as had before happened, the man's figure simply vanished, ceased to be where it had been.

CHAPTER III.

DURING his luncheon Mr. Marling had abundant leisure to review all this. What struck him most was what was remarked last—that the two figures side by side on the threshold had been equally real, one as material as the other. If anything, Mrs. Filmer had appeared the less probable. At all events, with her impenetrability and her negation of data, she was much less human, and much more forbidding.

Yet he knew that she was a living woman, fed on a good deal of butcher's meat and a sufficiency of malt liquors. He had his weekly books to show for it. What was the other? Of course, she had not seen it, nor could anyone else, except himself, see it; but was it therefore unreal?

Mr. Marling was exactly the sort of man to have "believed" in ghosts, and always had played at believing in them. But he had certainly never believed that he himself would ever see one, least of all his own. Did he now believe that he had? He found it impossible to arrive at any decision as to what his conviction was.

In so brief a story as this must be, I have, unfortunately, no time to describe accurately what his sensations concerning the whole occurrence were. It must merely be said that to him it was an occurrence, undoubted, veritable, as actual as any other episode of the morning or of his life. And it had aroused in him, not exactly dread, but misgiving

and emotion. Latterly he had been growing cowardly, and shrunk from emotion as liable to be distressing. This awakening of it was, therefore, vaguely but strongly disconcerting.

In the afternoon he found he could not read, much less write; he had what old ladies very excellently describe as the fidgets. He did not at all want to go out again, but he felt that it would become impossible to remain indoors. When he did go out he resolved to remain within his own high-walled gardens, and to this part of his resolution he adhered. But his object in confining himself to their limits was tiresomely defeated. He had grown so habituated to silence, or perpetual unspoken monologue, that it was repugnant to him to face the chance—slight enough surely—of being addressed, forced into some casual conversation, by anyone he might meet outside.

At some distance from the house, turning a corner, he came unexpectedly face to face with a young gardener. A year or two ago such a meeting would have pleased him, and the stalwart lad, with his excellent face and promising manner, have at once engaged his interest. For in those days Mr. Marling had found no study more fruitful than that of his fellow-creatures. Almost everybody he had discovered to be worth examination and comparison. The circle of his own individuality had perpetually been intersected by that of other people, and proving some varying measure of coincidence. And there would, in those days, have at once struck him certain fascinating appearances in such a young man as this.

No one certainly could have been “plainer”; but the young fellow’s smile was so engaging—spacious as it was—so broadly expressive of a

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delightful disposition, that no one with any appreciation of character could have wished him better looking.

His presence and his greeting now, however, annoyed Mr. Marling, who, had he considered the matter, would have taken it for granted that the gardeners must all have been nephews of Mrs. Filmer, and as free as herself from obtruding any claims on a living human interest.

The young gardener seemed resolved to talk, and painfully unaware of Mr. Marling's inclination for silence. He had, indeed, an irritating air of supposing that his master, in such a lonely place, might be rather glad to interchange a little talk even with an inferior. No one could conceivably have been more unlike a nephew of Mrs. Filmer's: there could not possibly be the most distant relationship. His very teeth (and they were extremely nice teeth, which added an almost dazzling brilliance to his irresistible smile) were confidential. His eyes insisted on avowal. One could scarcely fancy him indoors: he seemed to have been born in the open air, and to have lived there ever since.

All this was infinitely disconcerting to Mr. Marling, especially as he felt powerless to resist its attack. The irresistible smile was, entirely against his will, irresistible to him also.

Roger—such was the unnecessary young gardener's name—had no secrets; his private affairs were all for publication and discussion. It appeared he was engaged, and not only engaged but in love. All this was very tedious to Mr. Marling, who had given up the idea of ever again being in love himself, and was resolved not even to become engaged. Nor did Roger conceal his compassion for Mr. Marling living alone in yonder house, which it vexed his master to

perceive that the young man (who probably lodged in a four-roomed cottage) by no means envied. It was no wonder, Roger evidently considered, that Mr. Marling should look unwell, as he frankly, though most regretfully, declared that the gentleman did look. Perhaps what vexed the latter most was the exuberant pleasure in life which this infuriating young man let off, like a *feu-de-joie*, in all he said, and in every one of his maddeningly delightful smiles. He rejoiced in his work, but did not consider it at all underpaid. Full of pity for the dull monotony of his employer's existence, his own he plainly believed to have all reasonable variety that could be desired. With such comfortable purpose as a companion he could never be lonely, even though his work lay within those high, incommunicative brick walls.

Mr. Marling was quite relieved when Mrs. Filmer came to inform him that tea was ready, and not displeased at the sour look she directed at the smiling gardener. But he would rather she had come alone.

Close behind her, just as actual, as indisputable, walked the young man he had seen in the morning; and while the housekeeper betrayed no approval of her master's condescension towards the gardener, the young man, with Mr. Marling's own features, smiled in undisguised satisfaction and encouragement.

Mrs. Filmer's announcement that his tea was served sounded like a reproof and a command; but behind her back the young man shook his head, as though declaring that there was no hurry about the tea, and that Mr. Marling was better employed as he was.

This warning Mr. Marling obstinately decided to disregard; but he could not resist the same chill

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emotion that had seized him before, and he was more struck than ever by the difference between his present self and that discarded self that had come to expostulate with him. Vanity had never been a fault of his, and until now he had never given much consideration to his own appearance. But there was no avoiding the fact that yonder young man was handsome, and had a pleasing appearance, with a generous promise. No one—he felt disagreeable—could regard his own present appearance as admirable, with all its wretched betrayal of broken promise and pusillanimous abdication of purpose or desire.

His gaze was so unmistakable, that Mrs. Filmer turned round rather sharply, and the young gardener could not help following the direction of his glance.

“I am coming,” said Mr. Marling doggedly, and the figure behind the housekeeper vanished.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. MARLING enjoyed his tea—he was determined to enjoy it. He made some parade to himself of his appreciation of the creature comforts in which he had embedded himself in his self-contained residence. He was resolved to forget the gardener, and that other figure that had urged his remaining out of doors. Perhaps, however, his sensation of all these indoor conveniences was somewhat too deliberate, if not for sincerity, at all events for spontaneity. He made himself observe also the comfort of his bedroom when he went up thither to change before dinner; for though he lived alone, he always did change. This also increased his sense of *bien aise*.

The night had fallen wild and stormy. The wind had shifted into the north-east, and had brought a bitter sleet between its teeth to fling against his well-shuttered windows. But his fire burned red and clear, the house was well-built, the windows deep recessed and shuttered, heavily curtained, and impervious to draughts.

No doubt, even on such a night, some other people must be out of doors; but he was beginning to have some Pecksniffian appreciation of his own advantage in the contrast.

During his dinner (Mrs. Filmer was an excellent cook) this well-padded acquiescence in the dispositions of Providence was not decreased. The wind and sleet beat, indeed, noisily against the

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windows, but none the less brightly glowed his fire, not one flicker disturbed his shaded lamps.

Nevertheless, after his ample, yet by no means heavy, meal was over, something did happen to disturb him.

The neat if rubber-tyred "Eider" had left the room, he had a pleasant book, his coffee was puffing in its patent apparatus at his side, his walnuts and Madeira were all that could be desired. And he really did desire nothing (except to forget that gardener, and the other young man whom he had thrice seen that day). When a bit of coal fell out of the fire behind him, Mr. Marling rose to replace it, and as he did so his glance fell on the large old-fashioned looking-glass over the chimney-piece. The whole room was reflected in it—himself, too, of course. But something else, that instantly arrested his attention with a sense of disquiet that was almost dread.

In the chair from which he had that moment risen someone else was already seated, full in the light of lamp and fire ; a presentment of himself, indeed, but how hateful a presentment !

That it was himself he could not pretend to deny ; but older, and how horribly worsened ! Ten years older, perhaps, but how immeasurably degenerated ! Pendulous was the lip, and purplish ; moist and faded the nervous, wandering eyes ; blotched and coarsened the unhealthy, pallid, yet red-flecked skin ; and the whole confession of the face sensual, selfish, dull, hopeless and ashamed. He turned abruptly, but his chair was vacant as he had left it by his rising, and with a quick sigh of relief he noted it. A mere hallucination this time ! There had been no hallucination about those earlier appearances : contrasted with actual living persons, they had been as

real, as actual. But *this* was a mere apparition, momentary, evanescent, already past. With a surprising sense of thankfulness he turned again to the chimney-glass: in it the same figure was reflected, the position slightly altered, but with no other difference. He hated to look at it; to look at it, however, was inevitable, and with a reluctant curiosity he felt himself fascinated by it. The hair of the reflected figure was thin, and the hands tremulous, with a wavering, uncertain restlessness; the posture shrunken, mean, deprecatory. The man in the glass was obviously not old, but aged with an unnatural loss of youth that was feebly senile.

Twice he looked back at the chair, plainly empty; twice he stared again into the mirror, where the hateful image persisted. He fully understood. Here was but a picture, a forestalling. What he had seen earlier in the day *had been*: therefore the latter had been actual, and visible to the actual and direct sense of sight. Whereas this *might never be*. For the future is unborn, and may never come to birth. And so this hateful presentment of himself as he might become (as he was hastening to become) was not subject to direct vision, not patent to genuine visual apprehension, but reflected only, and to be seen only, "in a glass darkly." A sermon with an ugly text, but at least easy to understand.

Mr. Marling had never been stupid. He stood long by the hearth that he had wilfully chosen should be so lonely, looking by turns into the red heart of the fire and into the mirror with its menacing reflection, and comparing the figures he had seen that day, first with his present self, and then, by inevitable consequence, with that later future self that the glass held steadily.

At last, without drinking or even remembering his

coffee, he went slowly, full of thought, to his study. Here too he stood by the fire, thinking, echoes of many voices in his ears ; but though many, they were all one—his own from childhood until now. And these too reproached.

“ I am thyself what hast thou done to me ! ” And Bacon’s old apothegm crept into his memory, that the solitary must needs be at last a devil or a god. Was *he* growing god-like ?

A knocking came at his window, not mistakable for the tap of a blown branch, and he went without hesitation to open it ; though, as he drew back the heavy curtains and unfastened the barred shutters, he wondered what final presentment of himself this should be. The phenomenal had already grown familiar.

He threw open the window, which was, in fact, a glass door, and perceived outside in the driving sleet the face and figure of Roger, the unnecessary gardener.

He explained that he had asked Mrs. Filmer to tell the master that he was anxious to see him ; but she had refused flatly, saying it was too late, and that Mr. Marling was not to be disturbed. So he had made bold to come here to the window himself : he knew where the study was, and that there Mr. Marling sat.

By this time the young man had been brought in and the glass door shut behind him. Almost at the same moment Mrs. Filmer entered with her spirit decanters and her hot water, and sourly enough she stared at him. But he bravely told his errand, and even more bravely did her master disregard her stony disapproval.

There had been an accident : a motor, with a chauffeur only in it, had come to terrible grief a mile

outside the village, near the cottage where Roger lodged. The man seemed horribly injured ; perhaps he would die. He was evidently a foreigner, and the little he could say was quite unintelligible. He seemed in great distress, and eagerly desirous to impart something. Would Mr. Marling come ? Perhaps he would be able to understand the stranger's language.

Roger held out a letter in an envelope, saying it had fallen from the young man's pocket, and perhaps the name alone might be sufficient to inform Mr. Marling as to his nationality.

" Yes," said that gentleman, " the name is Italian. So are the postage stamps."

Mrs. Filmer lingered, and looked as full of interest as an iceberg. The wind raved round the house, and in wild gusts the sleet drove against the glass : the hearth glowed red, Mr. Marling's chair had an air of slothful invitation.

Inside was warmth and comfort, and common sense. Outside storm and chill, and an errand of doubtful utility.

" Yes," said Mr. Marling, " I will come with you at once. Just wait while I go and put my boots on."

Mrs. Filmer raised her eyebrows. The young gardener's smile became even unwontedly irresistible.

While Mr. Marling got on his boots he resolved to have the desolate foreigner brought here : he would nurse him himself. As he passed through the dining-room he walked eagerly up to the fireplace and looked into the mirror ; but it reflected only one image of himself, and that much more like the figures he had seen earlier in the day than any which a looking-glass had yielded him these three years.

Love's Monument.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a great house and a great party, but of all the hundreds of guests, many illustrious, two only concern us. Perhaps the two of whom the rest thought least.

It was for many beautiful and happy girls their first full look direct into the great "world": their *début*, their first entrance on the public stage of life. Perhaps they called it, to themselves, their first glimpse of *life* itself, as if life belonged less to the cradle than to the dance, were less actual in the nursery than in the crowded glitter of the ball-room.

But with them, their hopes and their uncertainties, their disappointments and compensations, we have no affair to-night.

Our business is with a man whom no one had ever called beautiful, and with a woman who considered herself to have written already "FINIS" beneath the brief tragedy of her life. If she bore some apparent share in such a scene at all it was only, she meant, as a spectator. To be henceforth a spectator of life was, she supposed unquestioningly, all that was left of it to her.

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When one has been cut in two and one half buried, what sort of life remains for the other? She had loved entirely, and been loved again with such a love as her own deserved. She had loved wisely, not a bit too well, though her love had been her whole self, her existence.

Then Nemesis had caught sight of her; and the golden cup had been dashed in mid-draught from her lips, the wine of life spilled out on to the thirsty sand of death, and black night fallen, unheralded by evening, unprefaced by afternoon, on the very morning of her day.

Less than a year after her marriage the horrid clang of war had jangled through the world, and her husband—no soldier, but a civilian of high place and consequence—had arisen at the sound, as if Honour called him as imperiously as any one of those whose trade was arms, had arisen and left her with the old, stale, cruel-brave excuse—

“I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.”

And Honour had kept him for her own, nor presently given back. In her lists his name stood high, and highest at the end. But to his love he was lost.

In a deep valley by a great and sombre river, silent flowing, dark and deep, the sentinel mountains keep watch about his grave for ever.

The din of war sank back at last into the piping song of peace, but his voice was stilled into the Great Silence. England dried her tears to give smiling welcome home to her tired heroes, but Elspeth's own hero had gone Home by another road, and rested far from the windy, white shores of the country he had died for. And Elspeth's tears sank

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from her eyes into her heart, where they lay chill, like a sad, salt pool.

Four years ago ! Sometimes it seemed to Elspeth that it all must have been not four but forty years ago ; at others that the first shock of her loss was fresh yesterday.

CHAPTER II.

BETWEEN Elspeth and the world there lay the curtain of her sorrow, and it had seemed to draw away from her into a sort of meaningless remoteness. She had lost its intimacy, and began to find she cared little for its acquaintance. Her own rank had been always high, and in wealth and place her husband had been at least her equal: a definite and marked position in the world was unalterably hers, but she found herself indifferent to it. She had no craven desire to abdicate life's duties, but they seemed to her to have grown obsolete.

And her own sense of aloofness from it seemed to re-act on its attitude towards herself. She was less and less Elspeth, more and more Lady Gracechurch. Girls in reality older than herself no longer treated her as one of themselves, nor did she care that they should. At three-and-twenty she was no longer a girl, but a very sad and silent woman, with nothing of life left, as she believed, but its flat and tedious epilogue.

To-night was her first re-entrance into the brilliant society of which she four years ago had been not the least brilliant figure; and she re-entered it at all, not to please herself, but to please her mother, who was, she half-truly told herself, a younger woman in all but the meaningless measure of time than herself.

As her maid dressed her she was as silent as her mistress, and scarcely less thoughtful. Not every

waiting-woman is like the shallow, chattering, flattering, back-biting Abigail of comedy and fiction. And Lady Gracechurch was a woman who created refinement all around her. Still young, the woman was nearly half a dozen years older than her mistress, and had been with her nearly ten. She had dressed her for her marriage, and of that arraying they were both silently thinking now.

Between some people sympathy is very silent. And the silence between these two women was not that of distance, imposed by their difference of rank ; there was established confidence between them, not confidences.

Not being at all beautiful herself, the elder woman was proud of the beauty of her mistress, which seemed as inevitable to her as her rank. And it had never shone, she thought, so brilliantly as to-night. It was like the dark brilliance of a night of stars.

As Lady Gracechurch swept down the broad white marble staircase her maid watched her from above, and her verdict was that of other judges—better qualified, as they at all events would have thought—who watched her from the great hall below.

Her dress and train were of black, but the black was relieved by lilac flowers, and by the star-like shining of almost regal gems. Dress and gems alike were, however, could only be, a mere impression, vague as it was satisfying : her own beauty dominated all sense of costume or splendour.

At the foot of the stairs she was greeted by her brother, standing by their widowed mother, her brother to honour whose coming-of-age she had resolved to appear to-night. And his boyish, obvious, though unexpressed admiration was but

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the translation of that expressed in every eye that fell on her.

"She is like a black flower," murmured a young nobleman who was darkly understood to be a poet, and had never been known to deny it.

"There are no black flowers," objected another young man with much shorter hair, whom no one had ever accused of poetry, "and if there were they would be ugly."

"I think," declared a rather old gentleman with a survival of taste for the mid-Victorian compliment, "that Lady Gracechurch reminds one of a white flower in a dark night. . . ."

"Just before the dawn," added a much younger gentleman.

Then Lady Gracechurch had descended among them, and their admiration was fain to be driven from their tongues into their eyes.

CHAPTER III.

As there were threescore guests staying in the house, it had been decided to break them up into small groups for dinner, which was served on a number of little tables in the huge marble hall.

Lady Gracechurch chose to sit at one where was only room for a single companion. No one took her in to dinner. She knew where the table was, and went to it alone. Standing by it was a man well known to her for several years by sight and by name, and was for several months known personally also.

"I hope I am not late," she said, as they bowed with a sort of grave air of laughing at themselves.

"It is no use my apologising that I could not bring you in. You know I could not!"

She did not answer, or seem to feel there was need of any. They sat down opposite each other, and as he took his place there was something even in the way he performed that slight action that would have betrayed his secret had Lady Gracechurch been a stranger and unaware of it.

Standing up and standing still Lord Oscathorpe had a graceful if not very stalwart figure. He was tall, taller than Lady Gracechurch, and slighter; his limbs were straight and well made; but even as he sat down one saw that he was lame, that the long, well-turned legs were useless and powerless. He had been carried thither, he would be carried hence; and in his face was already the expression that one

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reads in the countenance of the deformed, though deformed he was not.

An accident had made him what he was. Till eighteen or nineteen years of age he had been a model of stalwart strength.

Their table was under an alcove, and above the alcove was the small music gallery, in which was the string band. By their side a low and broad window opened out on to the terrace.

"We are to all intents and purposes alone," Lord Oscathorpe said to himself. "If it were any other two people our *tête-à-tête* would be labelled as ostentatious flirting."

He knew that she would not have arranged so to sit and dine alone with any other man but him, when she could have been at one of the other tables where were groups of four and six. It had been her own choice. She had herself told the duchess to have this table, too small certainly for more than two, arranged in this particular place; and as on this night each lady had herself chosen what gentleman should take her to dinner, she had chosen Lord Oscathorpe.

Had he been as other men, and she as other women, he knew she would have done none of this. So that, well content as he was to find himself thus chosen and thus placed, it was none the less with a certain irrepressible bitterness.

Presently he too looked at her, and considered her beauty, wondering, as the party at the foot of the great staircase had wondered, what it suggested. It did not occur to him that she was at all like any flower he had ever seen. Even a flower seemed too material an idea to associate with her.

"What are you thinking of!" she demanded, looking up suddenly. The words were much more

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an exclamation than a question, but he answered them.

"Of you, of course."

She glanced swiftly at him a look of half-resolved hostility. Had she been mistaken in him? Was he going to flirt with her—intending, that is, to try? That he intercepted her suspicion and resented it she perceived instantly.

"Of you, of course. When two people are sitting together like this, one of four things must happen!"

"Four seems a great many—it offers a wide resource of alternative."

She had dropped her suspicion and thrust all the hostility back into its sheath.

"Either," he pursued, observing the discarded hostility and ignoring her interruption, "either one's mind is a blank (which mine isn't) and one thinks of nobody, or one thinks of the absent (which is a breach of politeness and the fitness of things), or one thinks of oneself (which is nearly as rude), or one thinks of one's partner. I was doing the proper thing, and thinking of my partner."

("She is like a Moonlight Sonata," he said to himself; "not Beethoven's, but the one *I* should compose if I knew how to compose sonatas.")

"It sounds," remarked Lady Gracechurch, still observing him, "a good principle, but it may be carried too far."

He laughed.

"I will endeavour," he said, "to think of you as little as possible."

"I wish," she said presently, "they would play something else. It has a flippant twang about it, and has a bad effect on us."

It was indeed an air that, as a rather perky young

lady at another table was at that moment declaring, would have set John Knox and Mary Stuart flirting with one another had they been forced to sit and listen to it.

But the objectionable tune did not oblige Lady Gracechurch by finishing just yet.

"I hope," said Lord Oscathorpe, speaking perhaps under its influence, "that *you* are adopting the fourth and most polite of my alternatives, and thinking of *me*!"

"Yes, I am!" she answered, but not at all amiably. "You make me!" ("He *is* trying to flirt," she decided, "and it's beneath him. However, I really do think it's that horrid tune. It gets into one's head like cheap champagne.")

"When I admitted I was thinking of you, you didn't ask me *what* I was thinking. Which appeared to suggest that you didn't care to know. But I do care to know what you may be thinking about me," he rejoined.

He also thought it was the music, and absolved himself from the necessity of contrition. How could *he* help the music!

"To tell the truth," she answered with a fatal readiness, "I was thinking that I was disappointed in you."

"So that, after all, you were thinking of your own feelings, and only secondarily of me—in relation to them."

Even before he had begun to speak she had realised her own mistake, and then, almost simultaneously, that he was not going to take occasion by it. It is a much more intimate thing to scold a man than to praise him. To tell a man you are feeling disappointed in him is at least as much like flirting as anything he himself had said to her. She had

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given him almost the right to ask why she was disappointed, but he had forborne to use it.

Before he had finished speaking the obnoxious French air ceased. When another began, Lady Gracechurch and Lord Oscathorpe mutually realised that their *tête-à-tête* was at least becoming what she had intended.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER dinner the ball-guests began to arrive speedily. And Lord Oscathorpe said to Elspeth—

“ You know I cannot ask you to dance : it is no use telling you how I wish. . . . ”

She interrupted him, but with a swift gentleness.

“ I ’m glad you are not going to ask me, for I shall not dance. But as neither of us belong to the ball, we can please ourselves, and do as if there was no such a thing taking place . . . Let us sit out, really out. The marble terrace, with the Italian garden beneath it, will be lovely in this moonlight. Will you go and choose a place while I go and help my mother for quarter of an hour with her guests ? ”

He knew that this was to let him get to the place she mentioned without being forced to feel that she saw him carried thither. And when, quarter of an hour later, she found him stretched in a long lounging-chair, anyone would have supposed, to see him, that he had simply walked there like any other young man.

“ You *are* good ! ” he said. “ I didn’t expect you for a long time ! ”

“ I *said* quarter of an hour. . . . ”

“ Oh, yes ; but I thought that was merely to keep me quiet. ”

They both laughed, and she took her seat near him. The moonlight lay around her on the cold white marble like a lake.

“ Now she is the Lady of the Lake, ” he thought.

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Beneath them lay the Italian garden, its balustrades of marble, and its flower-beds bordered with marble, its marble walks and statues all very clearly defined in the broad moonlight: beyond, a little lake, long and sinuous, like a great silver snake lying twisted through the park and gardens.

In the lake lay the moon, as though it had fallen thither from the sky, but that there, in the sky, it hung still, a disc of chased silver.

The sound of the music came out and stood still to meet the divine silence of the night. Through the wide marble arches of the ballroom one saw the dance as in a framed picture. The smell of the flowers below seemed woven into a symphony with the pulse of the stringed music, the rhythm of the dancers' feet. . . .

Both of them were thinking the same thought—that such a scene was theirs, young as they both were, by right of memory only. He knew he could never dance again: she knew she would not.

"After all," he said quietly, finishing his thought aloud, as though he knew she had been sharing it, "life is more than that. Nearly everything remains."

She turned sharply.

"Nearly everything!"

"Forgive me," he answered: "perhaps I was thinking too much of myself."

His patience and courage reproved her for her reproof. To her it seemed he had lost everything. Like herself, he must look at life henceforth as a spectator through a window. Some such thought she clad in careful words now and expressed to him. But he shook his head.

"God," he declared, "has not taken everything. One power lost, all is not gone."

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She sighed.

"You are very brave," she said. "If I were you I should not be able to cast up the balance thus—to weigh the taken and the left."

"That," he answered, "is not bravery, but flat common sense."

A breathing of the summer night moved the trees beyond the lake: they seemed to whisper approvingly.

Her own loss was greater than his, but it scarcely seemed to her more final. It seemed to her marvellous that he could have room left for any sense of aught save that of self-pity.

Out came a wail of music, a waltz by no means new, but a favourite of her brother's, and played by his desire.

"When Strauss wrote that," said Lord Oscathorpe, "I wonder if he *meant* to preach, or if the sermon came in spite of the imperial and royal court bandmaster—like Balaam's prophecy in spite of the fallen prophet."

He knew he need explain no further to her. The waltz was a passion of sensuous beauty, an utter abandonment to life and time, suggestive of entire yielding to the siren-voice of pleasure; but under all and through all, till at last it rose over and dominated all, pierced a sob and a cry.

"Eat and drink," whispered the melody, "and dance. I am life," it murmured, "and my office it is to weave your carpet of flowers, and strew it with all fragrance."

"For to-morrow you die!" screamed the undertone.

The music fell again as a wave falls, and the breath of the night rose above it. For a long time they seemed fenced in a reluctant silence.

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Then it was she who began to speak ; and she told him how long she had been interested in him, and how often, in London for instance, she had watched him pass her in his carriage, and had thought she would like to know him. In reply he told her how he too had known her story, and had often, when they met, wondered if they could become friends and help each other.

“ And what do you think now ? ”

“ I do not think, I wait.”

This utterance scarcely pleased her, and he had hardly thought it would.

“ I have watched you now for four years,” he continued, “ watched you at your work.”

She said nothing, but turned towards him, and in her attitude there was question.

“ Your work, as it seemed to me, was to build a monument ; and the work was to be life-long. And the monument was to be—— ”

“ Love's ! ” she whispered.

He nodded gravely, and they both were silent.

“ At first, because I was very young then,” he went on at last, “ I thought you were right. That love's best monument was the immovable, life-long, unwavering recollection of the living ; that in abdicating life you were paying the great tribute to death . . . and that the tribute was his due, and was just.”

He paused again : but she had no interruption of comment or question.

“ But I was wrong,” he continued, “ to thus believe you right. Life cannot be abdicated. All death has any claim to is that which he actually takes. And what you proposed is not love's true monument.”

“ What, then, do you think it is ? ”

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"Kindness to the living," he answered. "Love of those who would be left loveless."

She made no rejoinder : and the music that came in breakers of sound was all that bridged the silence when he had ceased.

It seemed long before he spoke again.

"You called me brave just now," he said. "I am braver than you thought—foolhardy even. For I am letting you see plainly the audacity of my hopes. Nay, more, when I do ask, which will not be soon, I will take no denial. For it will be best for both of us."

She gave no answer. But all the voices of the night whispered of life, and that life is not to be flung as a wreath into the inexorable pit of death.

THE END.

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